



PRACTICE ADVICE

WORKING WITH SUPPORT PERSONNEL

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In the current climate of caseload challenges, many of us, across the spectrum of service provision, value the role of support staff. CASLPO developed a Position Statement entitled [Use of Support Personnel by Speech-Language Pathologists](#). This Position Statement provides information on preparation for the use of support personnel, service responsibilities, appropriate use and determining the amount of supervision required. A similar document has been developed for audiologists, [Use of Support Personnel by Audiologists](#).

You may wonder why we use the term "Support Personnel" rather than Communicative Disorders Assistant or CDA. There are several reasons for this, CDAs are not regulated, and therefore their title is not protected. Also, CASLPO cannot endorse one type of support personnel over another; the College recognizes the range of individuals who may fulfill the role of a support person. As we visit different areas of the Province what is especially valuable is to learn how differently our members recruit, train and use support personnel. Many areas hire graduates from the established CDA college programs while others historically have recruited support staff from the field of education; some members have turned to rehab assistants all of whom are then trained by the SLP.

Regardless of who is employed in the supportive personnel role, there are several important factors for members to consider when determining who is a support person and what duties they will perform. The audiologist or SLP is accountable for all services provided by support personnel and bears the legal and ethical responsibility for the patient/client's intervention at all times. The notion of ethical practice is sufficiently significant as to be included in our [Code of Ethics](#).

"Audiologists and Speech Language Pathologists will not allow support personnel to render services without supervision" Code of Ethics 2.4

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Q: Can a Speech Language Pathologist (SLP) from one agency supervise a communication disorders assistant employed by a different agency?

It is important that the employers involved and the staff understand the roles of supportive personnel and the supervising S-LPs (Section 1.a,b,c) . We recommend that an agreement between the agencies be considered. Every SLP supervising a support person is responsible for the patient/client receiving service. If a support person's competence in a particular activity falls below an acceptable level and does not change following a period of training, then that SLP must have the authority to withdraw or change the activities given to the support person (Section D2a).

Q: Can I use a Rehab Assistant as a support person to see patients in the hospital?

Yes you may, as long as you are able to supervise them according to CASLPO's Position Statement. You have to also consider the competency and experience of the support person. This would include:

1. Knowledge of the role of a support personnel
2. Knowledge of professional ethics applicable to their activities
3. The ability to relate to and interact respectfully and positively with patients/clients, family/caregivers and other members of the team.
4. The ability to manage time allotted to accomplish assigned tasks

Position Statement C2a

When there are new support personnel or new tasks assigned, it is the duty of the SLP to train and provide direct supervision for at least 20% of the time. Following the initial period, the supervising SLP must be readily accessible to speak to the support person and provide assistance as necessary.

Again, it would be important to consider the employment situation. If you as the SLP are not satisfied with the speech or language intervention the rehab assistant is providing, but the physio or OT were, how would that impact on your ability to continue to supervise the rehab assistant. You may want to ensure that there are provisions for this scenario should it arise.

Q: I practice in a rural area, with sites under my responsibility that are up to 7 hours away. Consequently, I cannot meet directly with the support personnel for weeks at a time. Can I use technology to supervise?

The final page of the Position Statement [Use of Support Personnel by Speech-Language Pathologists](#) provides definitions pertinent to supervising support personnel. 'Direct Supervision' refers to in-view observation of the support person providing intervention to a patient/client in real time. This allows the member to provide guidance and further on-the-job training. Direct supervision may also be provided at a distance through electronic means and the internet such as interactive video with audio. Make sure that the system you use is secure so you are not contravening the patient/client's privacy and that the system is acceptable to your employer.

Indirect supervision refers to all supervisory tasks which are not considered direct supervision. Again, the use of technology may be used; for example, telephone calls, e-mail, and the evaluation of audio taped or videotaped sessions.

It is worthwhile remembering that CASLPO's [Code of Ethics](#) states that members:

will ensure that the primary assessment/treatment/consultation with patients/clients will be a face-to-face encounter. General education materials and follow-up care may be judiciously delivered by electronic means(2.5);

We recommend that you re-read the Position Statement [Use of Support Personnel by Speech-Language Pathologists](#) to refresh your knowledge on how to use these valuable colleagues to best effect and in an ethical manner thereby protecting the public we serve.

If you have any questions please contact CASLPO.