



Rural speech pathologists' perceptions of working with allied health assistants: A pilot study



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Background: Speech pathology (SP) has significant recruitment and retention problems particularly in rural and remote areas. Some allied health disciplines address this problem by employing allied health assistants (AHAs) to deliver clinical services.

Aims: To examine rural SPs' perceptions of working with AHAs in providing clinical services.

Method: Semi structured interviews were conducted with eight rural SPs. Questions probed perceptions of role, supervision, budget and resource management, accountability, workload and productivity, skills, training and rural issues. Transcripts of the interviews were analysed to identify key themes.

Results: High agreement was reported regarding gaps in skills and knowledge for SPs regarding AHA supervision and delegation, lack of exposure to AHAs and a need for training in such skills. Participants perceived a lack of understanding of the SP role by management and the wider community as well as poor consultation regarding the introduction of AHAs into the health service. Considerable variation was evident regarding overall perceptions of working with AHAs, and potential tasks they could perform.

Conclusions: SPs need consultation and training with regard to working with and supervising AHAs. Increasing SPs' exposure to AHAs and standardising the role of AHAs may provide a way forward in this workforce redesign.

For the full report on this project visit our website, follow the link to the Rural Research Capacity Building Program and click on 'view completed projects'

Rachael is the senior speech-language pathologist at The Maitland Hospital in Hunter New England Health. Her clinical experience spans paediatrics, acute stroke, disability, rehabilitation and education. Rachael is passionate about improving access to speech-language pathology for rural communities. The Rural Research Capacity Building Program has inspired her to continue on to a research higher degree through the University of Newcastle.



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