

American Academy of Audiology
Position Statement

Audiology Assistants

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www.audiology.org

INTRODUCTION AND RATIONALE

This position statement defines the roles and functions of audiology assistants within an audiology practice. It provides guidance on the education and training, duties and responsibilities, and the requisite supervision of assistants. The statement is intended for audiologists, policymakers, consumers of audiological services, and persons seeking to become assistants.

As used herein, the term “audiology assistants” refers to individuals who perform hearing care-related tasks delegated by an audiologist and performed under the supervision of an audiologist that involve direct patient care activities. It does not refer to roles or duties that are administrative, financial, or clerical in nature. The term “audiology assistants” is used generically and thus also refers to those persons who may be called audiology aides, audiologic technicians, audiology assistants, or other similar titles.

The appropriate use of audiology assistants (“assistants”) positions audiology to meet the expanding needs for patient care in a cost-effective manner, without compromising patient outcomes or safety. The assistant’s purpose is to improve practice efficiency and productivity by increasing access to audiologic services, reducing wait times, enhancing patient satisfaction, and reducing costs by performing tasks that do not require the skills of a licensed audiologist.

It is the purpose of this statement to define the role of the audiology assistant in supporting audiologists in the delivery of audiologic services. It is incumbent upon the audiologist and audiology assistant to know all applicable state licensure laws or regulations and abide by such.

DEFINITION

An audiology assistant is a person who, after appropriate training and demonstration of competency, performs duties and responsibilities that are delegated, directed and supervised by an audiologist. The assistant’s role is to support the audiologist in performing routine tasks and duties so that the audiologist is available for the more complex evaluative, diagnostic, management and treatment services that require the education and training of a licensed audiologist.

POSITION STATEMENT

It is the position of the American Academy of Audiology that audiology assistants can provide valuable support to audiologists in the delivery of quality services to patients. The duties and responsibilities of audiology assistants should be delegated only by supervising audiologists and shall be based on the training, supervision, and specific work setting. The supervising audiologist is only qualified to supervise the roles and responsibilities assigned to the audiology assistant within the audiologist’s own level of competency and scope of practice. In all cases, the supervising audiologist maintains the legal and ethical responsibilities for all assigned activities that the audiology assistant performs. The needs of the consumer of audiology services and protection of the patient must always be paramount. Licensed audiologists, by virtue of their education and training, are the only professionals qualified to train and supervise audiology assistants.

The American Academy of Audiology does not see a need for state licensing of audiology assistants since these individuals should only work under the supervision of a state-licensed audiologist. The creation of a separate state licensure category for these types of support personnel is unnecessary and could prove confusing to consumers who may interpret such a separate licensure “category” as an indication that audiology assistants are independent practitioners.

DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The Academy's Code of Ethics, Rule 2D states:

"Individuals shall provide appropriate supervision and assume full responsibility for services delegated to supportive personnel. Individuals shall not delegate any service requiring professional competence to unqualified persons."

The duties and responsibilities assigned to an audiology assistant will be based on the training, available supervision, and practice setting and will be provided under the direction and responsibility of the supervising audiologist. In some cases, these duties and responsibilities may be further regulated by state law. Certain duties and responsibilities may require direct supervision and some may require indirect supervision. The duties and responsibilities of the audiology assistant must be limited to those that do not require professional judgment. Examples of the types of services an assistant can perform (after appropriate training and demonstration of competency) include, but are not limited to, equipment maintenance, hearing aid repair, neonatal hearing screening, preparation of a patient for electrophysiologic and balance testing, hearing conservation, air-conduction hearing procedure, and assisting the audiologist in testing.

The audiologist who employs and/or supervises audiology assistants shall maintain legal and ethical responsibility for all services provided by the assistants.

The audiologist is responsible for understanding and implementing appropriate billing processes when services are performed by an assistant. Some third-party payers, including Medicare, will not pay for services performed by an assistant.

EDUCATION AND TRAINING, PATIENT CARE AND SAFETY

The minimal educational background for an audiology assistant should be a high school diploma, or equivalent, and either formal educational training and/or competency-based training within the facility where they will be working. In addition, audiologists must consult their state's requirements as they pertain to the education and training of audiology assistants.

Formalized training programs, which have regimented instructional sequences, and which utilize an audiologist in the hands-on training of the assistant, are an appropriate means of training an audiology assistant. As the diversity in the duties and responsibilities may vary between practice locations and states, audiologists should evaluate training programs to determine if they provide a sufficient breadth of education and training in allowed procedures. While a formal training program may be appropriate and sufficient, the supervising audiologist remains responsible for ensuring that the assistant is competent in the assigned tasks within the individual practice setting.

On-site competency-based training provided by a supervising audiologist should include specific instruction and demonstration of each task the assistant is to perform, including documentation of this training. The assistant should not engage in the performance of these tasks until the assistant demonstrates the necessary degree of competency with the task.

The audiologist should also ensure that the assistant remains current with respect to knowledge, skills and competencies through continuing education and training. The audiologist will determine the need for ongoing training to update the assistant's skill set and/or introduction of new procedures, techniques and treatment options.

The audiologist, audiology assistant, and practice should be transparent with respect to informing patients as to the title and role of the assistant. Disclosure (oral or written) should be provided to patients, as appropriate.

SUPERVISION

It is the position of the Academy that services provided by an audiology assistant will be delegated, directed and supervised by the state-licensed audiologist. Tasks assigned must not extend beyond the defined range of knowledge and skills of the assistant.

Once the assistant is appropriately trained, the supervising audiologist should determine the level of day-to-day supervision required for the assigned tasks.

The number of assistants supervised by one audiologist will be in concert with the provision of the highest quality patient care. At all times, the supervising audiologist should hold paramount the patient's needs and entrust to the assistant only those services for which they are qualified.

Approved by the Academy Board of Directors, March 2021.