



# Speech Pathologists Board of Queensland

Policy.

## Guidelines for Registrants Supervising Speech Pathology Support Staff

---

### 1.1 Introduction

Speech pathology support staff are persons employed to assist speech pathologists in providing a speech pathology service. Their involvement in speech pathology programmes can enable professional staff to make more efficient and effective use of their own time and skills. Speech pathologists are considered to be in a supervisory relationship with support staff if they either delegate tasks to, or line-manage, such staff.

Support staff are often referred to as aides, assistants or activity supervisors. They may be employed wholly within a speech pathology service or as allied health assistants working across several allied health services. It is recommended that all support staff undertake formal training for these roles, (i.e., Certificate IV in Health Service Assistance (Allied Health Assistance) or in-house programmes such as the Queensland Health Allied Health Assistants Training.

These guidelines should assist registered speech pathologists who supervise or line-manage support staff to ensure that duties within the parameters of practice for speech pathologists alone are not delegated to support staff in contravention of the registration act / legislation. The guidelines are not relevant for support staff employed solely in administrative positions, and reflect the Parameters of Practice Guidelines prepared by Speech Pathology Australia as the professional representative body for the profession within Australia (Parameters of Practice (PoP), 2007, The Speech Pathology Association of Australia, Melbourne, Australia).

### 1.2 Title

The Speech Pathologists Board of Queensland administers legislation which provides for title protection with the title "Speech Pathologist" being reserved for individuals registered with the Speech Pathologists Board of Queensland.

Title protection as part of the regulation of a profession is one mechanism used to help the public readily identify those individuals who are registered with the Board, and who are subsequently accountable for the delivery of speech pathologist services which meet the established standards of the profession.

The Board takes seriously its role to safeguard public interest by ensuring that only qualified and competent speech pathologists use the title granted on registration. The misuse of the title most frequently occurs when an individual who is not a speech pathologist uses a title or practices in a manner which would lead a reasonable member of the public to presume that he or she was a registered speech pathologist, or when an individual who is a speech pathologist practices within Queensland yet is not registered with the Board.

Offences under the *Speech Pathologists Registration Act 2001* such as those described above carry a penalty of up to \$75,000.00.

### 1.3 Support Staff Responsibilities and Supervision Requirements

The following guidelines are given so that an aide or assistant will not unwillingly be placed in a position which could be described as an offence under the Act, nor an employer be placed in the position of aiding or abetting such an offence.

- 1.3.1 Speech pathologist support staff should always work under the supervision of speech pathologist who has at least one year of full time clinical practice experience since graduation. This is accord with the competency recommended for supervision of clinical students (PoP, 2007), and should ensure that the speech pathologist has the experience necessary to determine the competency of the support staff to undertake delegated duties, and to accept legal responsibility for those actions.
- 1.3.2 Speech pathology support staff should be directly responsible to either the employing speech pathologist or a designated speech pathologist. In the event of that speech pathologist being absent, provision should be made for an alternative method of supervision. Frequency of supervision may vary according to the complexity of the situation. As complexity could change over time, it is recommended that supervision schedules and frequency be reviewed periodically.

Speech pathologists have a responsibility to ensure that:

- the assistant is clearly and correctly identified as an assistant at all times;
- the assistant 's role is clearly explained to others in the workplace, including clients and their carers, to ensure that the assistant is not seen to be acting as a speech pathologist;
- the assistant understands the limits of their responsibilities;
- the assistant is trained to the level appropriate for the tasks required in that facility;
- the assistant is provided with clear direction as to the work that can be undertaken;
- clearly defined lines of communication between the assistant and the supervising speech pathologist are established, and reviewed on a regular basis;
- the quality of the work of the assistant is regularly evaluated to ensure that they are safe, effective, efficient, competent, and within the legislative parameters;
- an assistant is never requested or required to undertake a task which is outside their competence or that cannot be delegated as defined in this policy;
- they retain the ultimate responsibility for the management of their client including responsibility for appropriate delegation to the assistant, and ensuring that the assistant only accepts delegated tasks within their capability.

- 1.3.3 Speech pathology support staff should be aware of the importance of the following:

- respect for the rights and dignity of clients;
- need for liaison and open communication with the treating therapist;
- confidentiality;
- standards of personal conduct;
- responsibility in only undertaking tasks within limits of competence;
- standards of care appropriate for the facility;
- penalties for using the title "speech pathologist" when not registered as such.

- 1.3.4 The following activities should not be the responsibility of support staff:

- selection and interpretation of referrals;
- conducting initial interviews with clients;
- undertaking and interpreting assessment procedures/results – the speech pathologist may delegate some screening or informal observational activities for the assistant to undertake but the assessment process and diagnostic interpretation must remain the overall responsibility of the speech pathologist;
- developing or modifying goals for treatment and treatment plans;

- formally record notes in clients' records, unless permitted by departmental policy, and assessed as competent to do so with the notes being directly related to the assistant's actions;
- giving interpretive information to clients, relatives or other staff;
- discharge planning and decisions.

In summary, speech pathologists are advised of the following key statements taken from the Parameters of Practice document (2007):-

- Assessment and management of disorders of communication and swallowing are core components of the speech pathologist's scope of practice;
- The provision of communication and swallowing intervention and services to clients should, in most instances, be delivered by speech pathologists rather than non-speech pathologist;
- Successful performance of complex professional tasks such as differential diagnosis, clinical problem-solving and therapy planning relies on the interplay and integration of a broad but closely linked knowledge base and is therefore not transferable (p.11).
- Speech pathologists remain responsible and accountable for care provided by staff under their supervision;
- Speech pathologists must develop key documents, guidelines and protocols to guide the practice of the support worker;
- Speech pathologists must establish the competency of a support worker to complete a task in a specific context;
- Complex speech pathology tasks must not be delegated to non-speech pathologists (p.12).

Further information regarding the Parameters of Practice for Speech Pathologists can be found in the document released by Speech Pathology Australia, and the Code of Ethics for Speech Pathologists from the same source ([www.speechpathologyaustralia.org.au](http://www.speechpathologyaustralia.org.au))

#### References:

- Council of Occupational Therapists Registration Boards (Australia and New Zealand) Inc 2005 – Policy: Occupational therapy support staff.
- Queensland Health – Draft Allied Health Assistants Supervision and Training, 2005.
- Queensland Nursing Council – Scope of Practice: Framework for nurses and midwives, 2005.
- Speech Pathology Australia – Parameters of Practice: Guidelines for delegation, collaboration and teamwork in speech pathology practice, 2007.