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Healthcare Providers Role in the Identification of Communication Disorders

Jessica R. Stewart[1], Pradyumn Srivastava[2]

Authour(s) Details:

Associate Professor, Director of Graduate Studies, Department of Speech Pathology and Audiology M/S 152; 1664 North Virginia Street, University of Nevada School of Medicine; Reno, NV 89557-0357

Corresponding Address: Pradyumn (Prady) Srivastava**,** Associate Professor, Director of Graduate Studies, Department of Speech Pathology and Audiology M/S 152; 1664 North Virginia Street, University of Nevada School of Medicine; Reno, NV 89557-0357; Phone: (775) 682-7015; Fax: (775) 784-4095

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Introduction

The ability to communicate is an exceptional human process that allows us all to enter the social world that is so precious to every one of us. When a child is struggling with communication, the impact can be widespread effecting academics, self-esteem, social interaction, quality of life, and even later vocational choices. The good news is that we have successful, evidence-based interventions that can result in positive outcomes for children, especially when intervention is provided early in life.[1]

Speech and language pathologist are the primary profession involved in the assessment, diagnosis, and treatment of childhood communication disorders; however, many other healthcare providers play critical roles. For example, paediatricians are often one of the first healthcare providers to identify children struggling with communication and refer them for necessary screenings and evaluations and various healthcare providers often play crucial roles on multidisciplinary teams exploring the nature of communication deficits. It is of the utmost importance that all providers encountering children in their practice be aware of communication and how delays and deficits in communication can present to provide these children with the best possible trajectories.

Estimates of prevalence rates of communication disorders vary significantly globally. For example, in the United States, approximately 7.7% of children present with communication disorders [2,3], in South India the prevalence rate is estimated to be 3.4% [4], and in Spain the prevalence is estimated to be 1.1%. [5]

Although there is much, we don't know about communication disorders, we do know that they affect many children globally and early identification is a key to successful outcomes. All healthcare professionals providing services to children can play a role in identifying children struggling with communication at young ages so these children can begin to receive needed interventions. There is a need for collaboration across health care providers, international collaboration, and continued professional education when it comes to communication disorders. We all can do our part.

It is difficult to know the true prevalence of communication disorders as many children remain undiagnosed.[2, 3] This is compounded by the fact that differences in clinical traditions and cultural differences are present across countries which could interact with the presentation, identification and treatment of communication disorders.[6]

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