

Feeding and Swallowing Disorders in the First Two Years of Life: What Role for the Speech-Language Pathologist?

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Abstract

Purpose: Infant feeding/swallowing disorders are increasingly prevalent due to medical advances and improved outcomes. Many professionals work with these infants but roles remain undefined. What do students and clinicians think about the role of the speech and language therapist/pathologist (SLP) in infant feeding/swallowing teams and what influences opinions and knowledge: formal education and/or increased field experience?

Methods: An anonymous Qualtrics survey was distributed to students (n=98) via teaching institutions in Pennsylvania and clinicians (n=90) via the ASHA Special Interest Groups 13 and 16. In the USA students qualify to practice after master's level (graduates) education with undergraduate education being a general degree.

Results: Students and clinicians agreed that it is extremely important to use team-based care for infants with feeding/swallowing disorders (undergraduates 50%, graduates 77%, and clinicians 87%). Participants reported learning about infant feeding/swallowing disorders in various settings. Reports of never having learned about this topic varied (undergraduates 42%, graduates 27%, and clinicians 2%). More undergraduates wanted to learn about this topic in their undergraduate education (83%), while graduates (78%) and clinicians (51%) preferred it to be part of graduate education.

Conclusions: Regardless of experience participants believed SLPs have a role in infant feeding/swallowing teams. Training for SLPs in this highly specialized area is inconsistent and dependent upon available academic resources. Providing education during formal class and/or clinic is important. The caveat is that this education may provide a false sense of competency and potentially influence whether students continue seeking out learning opportunities.

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