Job Title
Speech-language pathologist

General Overview
Speech-language pathologists assess and treat individuals affected by a wide array of communication and swallowing delays and disorders. These include speech disorders (e.g., stutters, pronunciation, pitch problems), cognitive communication disorders (e.g., reasoning, problem-solving, memory), pre-literacy and literacy disorders (reading comprehension, decoding) and more (Speech-Language and Audiology Canada, 2014b). They take care of patients of all ages who suffer/have suffered from stroke, brain injury, Parkinson’s, autism, and many other physiological, developmental, or emotional conditions (The Ontario Association of Speech-Language Pathologists and Audiologists, 2010).

Speech-language pathologists work in a variety of environments such as hospitals, rehabilitation centers, private practices, research centers, schools, and nursing homes. The National Household Survey of 2011 revealed that approximately 62% of speech-language pathologists (and audiologists) worked in the health care system (~32% in hospitals, 18% in private practices according to the 2006 census) (Service Canada, 2013), while the other 28% worked in the education system (Employment Ontario, 2013).

Job duties and responsibilities
Speech-Language Pathologists are responsible for the clinical and/or instrumental screening, assessment, identification, and diagnosis of disorders (Speech-Language and Audiology Canada, 2014b). This often includes administering speech and language or hearing tests to discover the type and degree of impairment. They must then develop a treatment plan for the patient and educate them on various subjects including effective communication techniques or coping strategies (O*Net, 2013).

Speech-Language Pathologists work alongside a large number of other health professionals including physicians, psychologists, and social workers for initial identification of the disorder or for referral purposes (Speech-Language and Audiology Canada, 2014b). They are also responsible for monitoring patients’ progress, which involves keeping detailed reports and adjusting treatment when necessary (O*Net, 2013). They may also be involved in the promotion and prevention of communication and swallowing disorders with their clients and within their community. Some speech-language pathologists are also involved in research and teaching (Speech-Language and Audiology Canada, 2014b).

Typical workday
Most Speech-Language Pathologists work full time, indoors, during regular work hours. They usually do not need to work unusual shifts or hours, as they do not deal with any emergencies. They meet with clients/patients, do administrative work such as writing and filing reports, and answer the phone as well as their e-mail (O*Net, 2013). They are often working in a group or a team and therefore consult and meet with their partners regularly. They operate a variety of communication tools and technologies such as audiometers, flow sensors, speech mirrors, stroboscopes, voice synthesizers, and others (Speech-Language and Audiology Canada, 2014b).
**Educational requirements and other qualifications**

To become a speech-language pathologist, one must obtain a Master’s degree in Speech Language Pathology. There are 11 Speech-Language Pathology programs offered in Canada and most of these include a clinical practicum (College of Audiologists and Speech-Language Pathologists of Ontario, 2013). It is a science-based program in which they study anatomy and physiology, but they are also required to study neuroanatomy, genetics, human and language development, linguistics, psychology, acoustics and more (Speech-Language and Audiology Canada, 2014a). Once their degree is completed, the individual must register with the appropriate licensing body. In Ontario, you must be registered with the College of Audiologists and Speech-Language Pathologists of Ontario (CASLPO). You must provide proof of the completion of your degree from an accredited program, as well as proof of the completion of a minimum of 300 clinical hours supervised by the university you attended. After registering, an individual must be mentored for six months (500 hours) by an accredited speech language pathologist, in good standing with CASLPO, who has at least four years of professional practice experience. After completing their mentorship, they may go on to practice on their own (CASLPO, 2013). Pursuing a PhD in Speech-Language Pathology would advantage an individual who wants to conduct research and/or teach but there are no differences in the ability to practice between a Masters holder and a PhD holder (S. Butler, personal communication, November 21st, 2014).

**Related skills, interests, and abilities**

Speech-language pathologists must have outstanding communication skills (Ontario Council of University Programs in Rehabilitation Sciences, 2009). They must be able to listen actively to their patients’ issues, and they must often identify speech disorders by listening to them speak. They must be able to express and communicate information clearly. For example, they may need to take results of communication tests and report them to their patients, a non-medical audience (American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, 2006). They may also model pronunciation for individuals who need help with their speech. Since they are around people all the time, it is required that they be sociable in their communication and pleasant to work with. They must show compassion towards their patients and genuine caring for their condition (O*Net, 2013).

Speech-language pathologists should be able to think critically and solve problems. Patients come to them with an issue and they need to develop a specific and individualized treatment plan, which requires exploring different options and weighing the advantages and disadvantages of each (O*Net, 2013).

Another important skill for this profession is writing. Speech-language pathologists must write progress and evaluation reports which must be detailed and clear for accurate treatment (OCUPRS, 2009). They must be able to go back to their files after what may be a long period of time without anything about the case being ambiguous. It is also important for referral and patient transfer purposes (ASHA, 2006). A patient may need to be transferred to another health professional that may need past records of their condition. They may also need to write information sheets for patients on the details of their condition and their treatment, such as instructions on exercises to do at home, what results they can expect from treatment, etc. (O*Net, 2013).
Relevance of Psychology undergraduate degree

Psychology is of utmost importance to this profession (ASHA, 2014). Speech-language pathologists must have knowledge of human biological, cognitive, and socio-emotional development, as a wide variety of the disorders they deal with are due to developmental delays or conditions. They must also know about a variety of mental processes such as language, learning, memory, attention, perception, conceptual development, decision-making, and more. They are also required to comprehend methods and procedures for diagnosis, treatment, and rehabilitation of physical and mental dysfunctions (CALSPO, 2014). They need to know about individual differences in ability, as well as in learning and motivation, to be able to provide specific and the most effective treatment and strategies to each unique individual (O*Net, 2013). As a matter of fact, a background in Psychology is required to be admitted into most Speech-Language Pathology programs in Canada. This requirement is often directed toward Developmental Psychology courses and Cognitive Psychology courses (The University of British Columbia, 2014; University of Toronto, 2014; UOttawa, 2014; McGill University, 2014). A strong statistical background is also required, which is provided in Psychology degrees.

Salary potential

In 2010, the average salary for a speech-language pathologist in Ontario was approximately $74,680, compared to the average salary for all occupations of 61,495$ (Employment Ontario, 2013). The City of Ottawa reports salaries between 23 and 50$ an hour (Labour Market Ottawa, 2012). Recent job posting ads through the jobbank.gc.ca website advertise around 22 to 23$ for someone with little experience, and around 42$ an hour to someone with approximately five years of experience.

Job outlook

Employment rates for speech-language pathologists in Ontario have raised 38% from 2001 to 2011, compared to the 37% increase in professional health care in general and 14% increase for all occupations. A 51% increase in new job openings is expected from 2013 to 2017, compared to 46% in all professional health care and 34% in all occupations. However, the expected percent of job openings due to attrition is slightly lower than for professional health care and all occupations. The employment prospect rating, as assessed by the government of Ontario, was above average from 2009 to 2013, but is now rated as average for the 2013 to 2017 period. This signifies that job opportunities will be harder to find in the market than in the recent past, but stable work is still available and wages and rates have recently increased (Employment Ontario, 2013). However, the National Outlook 10-year projection (2013-2022) predicts a Canada wide high demand for speech-language pathologists, with the number of jobs exceeding the number of workers available (Job Bank, 2013).

To apply

The National Occupation Classification (NOC) #3141 may be used through any government website or any search engine to find relevant job listings. Job postings are also posted regularly on the Speech-Language and Audiology Canada website at http://sac-oac.ca/
To know more

To find out more about speech language pathologists, please visit the Speech-Language and Audiology Canada website at http://sac-oac.ca/

For Ontario specific information, please visit the Ontario Speech-Language Pathologists and Audiologists Association of Ontario at https://www.osla.on.ca/
References


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