

Fact Sheet: Audiology

Nature of the Work

Audiologists are autonomous professionals who identify, assess, and manage disorders of the auditory, balance, and other neural systems. Audiologists provide audiological (aural) rehabilitation to children and adults across the entire age span. Audiologists select, fit and dispense amplification systems such as hearing aids and related devices. Audiologists prevent hearing loss through the provision and fitting of hearing protective devices, consultation on the effects of noise on hearing, and consumer education. Audiologists are involved in auditory and related research pertinent to the prevention, identification, and management of hearing loss, tinnitus, and balance system dysfunction. Audiologists serve as expert witnesses in litigation related to their areas of expertise. They perform services and activities which include the following:

- Provide direct clinical services to individuals with hearing and balance disorders
- Develop and carry out a treatment program
- Examine and clean the ear canal, fit, and dispense a hearing aid or other assistive device, and audiologic rehabilitation
- Recommend, fit and dispense personal or large area amplification systems, such as hearing aids and FM or alerting devices
- Provide fitting and tuning of cochlear implants and provide the necessary rehabilitation for adjustment to listening with implant amplification systems
- Provision of speech (lip) reading training
- Collaborative consultation as a member of interdisciplinary professional teams in planning and implementing service delivery for children and adults from birth to older age
- Keep records on the initial evaluation, progress and discharge of clients which helps to pinpoint problems and keep track of client progress
- Test noise levels in workplaces and conduct hearing protection programs in industry as well as in schools and communities
- Consultation and expert witness testimony on environmental noise and occupational noise-induced hearing loss
- Conduct research on types of treatment for hearing, balance, and related disorders.

Work Sites

Audiologists provide services and work in many different types of facilities:

- Public and private schools
- Hospitals
- Rehabilitation centers
- Residential health facilities
- Community clinics
- Colleges and universities
- Private practice offices
- Health departments
- State and federal government agencies
- Industry with hearing conservation programs

- Long-term care facilities
- Community hearing and speech centers
- Physicians offices
- Research laboratories

Entry Requirements

To enter this career, one must have the ability to relate to patients/clients and their families/care givers about the diagnosis of disability and audiologic rehabilitation plans; explain technology developments and devices that assist children and adults with hearing loss. Audiologists should be able to effectively communicate diagnostic test results, interpretation, and proposed treatment in a manner easily understood by their clients and professionals. They must be able to approach problems objectively and provide support to clients and their families. A client's progress may be slow, so patience, compassion and good listening skills are necessary.

During high school, prospective audiologists should consider a program with courses in biology, physics, mathematics, and psychology. On the undergraduate level, a strong liberal arts focus is recommended, with course work in linguistics, phonetics, psychology, speech and hearing, and/or the biological and physical sciences. A program of study in audiology is not available at the undergraduate level. Typically, students obtain an undergraduate degree in communication sciences which provides introductory course work in audiology. About 120 colleges and universities offer graduate programs in audiology in the United States. Course work includes anatomy and physiology, basic science, math, auditory, balance and normal and abnormal communication development. Those with a graduate degree are required by ASHA to obtain the ASHA Certificate of Clinical Competence (CCC). To earn the CCC, a person must have a graduate degree and 375 hours of supervised clinical experience, complete a 36-week postgraduate clinical fellowship and pass a written examination. In most states, speech-language pathologists and audiologists also must comply with state regulatory (licensure) standards to practice and/or have state education certification. The requirements are very similar or identical to ASHA's CCC requirements.

Earnings

Salaries of audiologists depend on their educational background, specialty and experience, along with the geographical location and type of setting in which they work. The median salary for ASHA-certified audiologists in 1997 was \$43,000. Persons in supervisory positions for example in administration and management, may earn well over \$64,500 per year. While the 1997 median salary for certified audiologists with 1-3 years experience was \$32,000, the median salary for certified audiologists with doctorate degrees was over \$55,000. Good benefits packages, such as insurance programs and leave, are usually available to these professionals.

Working Conditions

Audiologists typically work in clinical service delivery or educational settings such as, hospitals, residential health facilities, clinics, hearing and speech centers, private practice offices, schools, physician offices, universities and industries with hearing conservation programs. The job does not require physical labor, but does require the ability to relate to patients/clients and their families/care givers about the diagnosis of disability and audiologic rehabilitation treatment plans; explain technology development and devices that assist children and adults with hearing loss and related disorders; and consult with other professionals and paraprofessionals, the public, and policy makers about the effects of hearing loss, balance disorders and tinnitus on the quality of life and the needs of persons with these disabilities. Most full-time audiologists work 40-50 hours per week and some work part-time. Typically, the audiologists interacts with a broad range of professional in interdisciplinary teams.

Size of the Profession

The American Speech-Language Hearing Association (ASHA) represents 96,636 professionals. Audiologists held about 12,200 jobs in 1997. About one-half provided services in non-residential health care facilities, including private physician offices, private practices, and speech and hearing centers. More than 23% were employed in hospitals, 10% in school settings, and 8% in colleges and universities. Some audiologists contract to provide services in schools, hospitals or nursing homes or work as consultants to the industry. The majority of audiologists provide direct clinical services but others serve as program administrators, university professors, scientists, consultants and expert witnesses. Some provide consultation about community noise.

Future Outlook

Employment of audiologists is expected to increase much faster than the average for all occupations through the year 2006. Employment in health and rehabilitation services will increase as a result of advances in medical technology and growth in the elderly population. Employment in schools will increase along with growth in elementary and secondary school enrollments, including enrollment of special education students. Greater awareness of the importance of early identification and diagnosis of speech, language and hearing disorders will also increase employment