



## Competence Required for Working with Patients with Dysphagia

Speech Pathology Australia's Overseas Qualifications Eligibility Assessors must ensure that applicants can demonstrate that they have the training and/or experience to be competent in dysphagia management.

Speech Pathology Australia looks for evidence to confirm you have attained the level of competence that would enable you to work independently with dysphagia patients **of any age**. (Please note that at "Entry-Level", as specified in our Range Indicator statement (CBOS 2001), you would be expected to know how and when to seek help with complex patients.)

The Association believes the required level of competence is similar to the level of post registration dysphagia training provided in the UK. Consequently, a section of the report from RCSLT web pages and an extract from the Sheffield Dysphagia Continuum (Sue Pownall) are reproduced below. These statements appear to be generally consistent with the Association's expectation for Entry-Level competency, which is the benchmark used for assessing any qualification for membership of Speech Pathology Australia.

You should provide certified evidence of your ability to work at this level in the area of dysphagia. Such evidence may include:

- information about your coursework and clinical experience during your education to become a speech pathologist
- information about subsequent educational activities you have undertaken in this area
- confirmation by a work supervisor that you have demonstrated these competencies in the workplace

If you do not have such evidence, you will need to undertake some additional study in this area. In this case, it is recommended that you complete study in your country of origin to achieve the level of competence required.

If you wish to undertake any necessary additional study after arrival in Australia, you may wish to approach the universities which offer speech pathology programs to see if they offer a single subject type enrolment in dysphagia. It is strongly recommended that you investigate this prior to your arrival. Please note that you will be required to enrol in the relevant subject at the university to complete this requirement.

An option currently available is:

- An online eLearning course is available through Auckland University in New Zealand. You may be able to complete this course prior to arriving in Australia, or you may be able to commence the course in your home country and complete the subject after your arrival in Australia. For further information please refer to <http://www.psych.auckland.ac.nz/uoahome/about/our-research/research-groups/speech-science>

It may be possible to create a self study package through reading and through the professional development activities of Speech Pathology Australia (contact National Office for a list of upcoming events in your state). Overseas universities may provide distance education units you could consider. You may find a hospital clinic which would assist with providing clinical observation. It is anticipated 30-40 hours of study should suffice, as long as you can achieve the level of competence outlined in this paper.





## Statements generally consistent with Speech Pathology Australia's expectation for Entry-Level competency in dysphagia assessment and management

### 1. From Royal College of Speech Language Therapists report by the Dysphagia Working Group

#### Assessment

- recommendations on referral for instrumental assessment, e.g. videofluoroscopy;
- knowledge of a range of formal and informal procedures;
- knowledge of psychosocial factors related to dysphagia.

#### Management

- management strategies, e.g. compensatory techniques, therapy exercises;
- more common aspects of alternative methods of feeding, e.g. PEG.

#### Skills-Base

While maintaining an awareness of when to seek advice/support from a more experienced practitioner, it is expected that a therapist working without supervision would be able to:

- prioritise and manage a dysphagia caseload within the context of a larger case load;
- use compensatory techniques within therapy;
- optimise the environment for the client and carers in relation to eating and drinking;
- contribute to the decision making process regarding risk factors and non-oral feeding;
- advise on risk management;
- apply management strategies including compensatory techniques, therapeutic exercises, positioning and food consistencies;
- interpret videofluoroscopy and recommend appropriate management;
- select appropriate assessment procedures;
- train other professionals and carers;
- advise and support clients, relatives, carers and professionals in the multidisciplinary team;
- co-ordinate a multidisciplinary team approach;
- provide basic training within the multidisciplinary team.

### 2. A summary of the standards set out as the "Sheffield Level 4" (from the Sheffield Continuum, Sue Pownall, Sheffield)

The competencies at this level are described as:

- independently managing a caseload of classical (rather than complex) cases
- feeding/clinical assessment
- determining safety with trialled foods and thickened fluids
- management decisions:
  - change of diet
  - strategies
  - therapies
- recognising need for further assessment:
  - second opinion
  - VF
  - FEES
- prioritisation from defined criteria
- determining safety of oral feeding vs alternative feeding (acute condition)
- providing feedback to client/referral source re: status of swallow and feeding recommendations
- liaison with other professionals regarding assessment/management
- education - basic awareness training and training around issues/competencies from levels one to four
- participation in audit or research.

