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November 1988

Dear General Manager

SPEECH THERAPISTS' ASSISTANTS

1. Advance Letter (SP)1/88 sets out in Appendix B the conditions of service for the new grade of Speech Therapists' Assistant.
2. Until 15 January 1988 Speech Therapists' Assistants had been placed on ad hoc grades and experience of their employment was limited.
3. It is for District Speech Therapists in consultation with District unit management to appoint assistants as appropriate in the light of local knowledge.
4. However, in making these appointments the following guidelines, which have been agreed by the College of Speech Therapists and the Association of Speech Therapy Managers, may be helpful:

4.1 the Speech Therapists' Assistant should be an integral member of the speech therapy team. The assistant will not be a professional but will, under supervision and direction, have certain useful competences which can be used to benefit patients and the speech therapy services as a whole;

4.2 Speech Therapists' Assistants are not an alternative to trained speech therapy staff but may be used to the full to free scarce professional time for professional tasks;

4.3 thus, the assistants should not assess or diagnose patients, admit them to or discharge them from the service or design or amend treatment plans.

4.4 Examples of tasks which could be allotted to assistants are:

specific treatment tasks in a multi-patient setting with supervision by a speech therapist;

routine work with patients on a one to one basis with regular monitoring and programme adjustment by a speech therapist;

the preparation of rooms and equipment and their general care and maintenance;

collection and return of patients where appropriate and help with their personal needs and mobility;

other tasks which take up professional speech therapy time;

4.5 Tasks will be assigned to the assistant by the speech therapist concerned who will remain responsible for the assistant's work and for the welfare of the patients. Although the speech therapist need not provide direct or immediate supervision at all times, the task carried out will be part of a total treatment plan devised by the speech therapist who should monitor and reassess progress at regular intervals.

5. Speech therapy managers will determine the ratio of qualified to unqualified staff best suited to local needs and also the seniority and/or speciality necessary for those staff supervising assistants.

6. The assistants will be managed by a speech therapist of at least B grade; if the assistant is working in more than one venue, management should be delegated to a single speech therapist who would be responsible for the performance appraisal and career development of the assistant.

7. Training and support of assistants:

7.1 it is suggested that the training of assistants should be in-service and reflect local needs and the tasks involved. Speech therapy managers should determine what training is necessary and may combine on regional or other bases to provide this;

7.2 assistants should be able to attend appropriate workshops, courses and training days to increase knowledge of the subject area, maintain motivation and create understanding of the role of the assistant within the speech therapy team;

7.3 speech therapy managers will ensure that suitable support is provided for assistants and staff supervising them. They will also be responsible for devising alternative arrangements for supervision when speech therapy vacancies occur.

8. The aim of employing speech therapists' assistants is to improve the service to the patient population and to provide a better use of the professional expertise and experience of in-post therapists. It is important that health authorities and district speech therapy departments cooperate in allowing proper introduction of the assistants grade, in-service training and direction for assistants.

9. The guidance in this letter will be cancelled and deleted from the current communications index, on 30 November 1991, unless notified separately.

Yours sincerely

*Isabel N. Nisbet*

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