Speech-Language Pathology Service Provision for Young Children in British Columbia

SURVEY RESULTS (December, 2015)

Background
Communication Matters, a speech-language pathology advocacy group in British Columbia, distributed a survey to speech-language pathologists (SLPs) across the province to gather information about services being provided for preschool-age children through publicly funded programs.

Response Rate
Of the total number of SLPs who responded to this survey, 141 were working with preschool-age children in publicly funded programs. This was the target group of SLPs whose responses were analyzed for this survey. These 141 SLPs accounted for 60% of all SLPs listed in the BC SLP Council for Early Childhood Development – a list of publicly funded SLPs working with preschool-age children in BC.

What We Learned
1. More than 85% of SLPs reported caseloads that exceed the recommended caseload size of between 25-40 children (source: http://www.therapybc.ca/pdf/PreferredPracticeGuidelines.pdf).

As illustrated below, the most commonly reported caseload size was 60-80 children with some caseloads exceeding 160 children (when scaled for 1.0 Full Time Equivalent (FTE)).
2. A small minority (just 5%) of SLPs stated that they were able to provide the clinically recommended level of service to the majority of children on their caseloads.

3. When asked about waitlists, 85% of SLPs reported waitlists for access to SLP services in their community. This area requires further investigation.

4. More than 75% of SLPs reported using strategies to improve efficiency of SLP time. Examples of these strategies included: therapy groups, consultative model of therapy, referrals to Communication Disorders Assistants or similar, transdisciplinary model of therapy, and participation in a process of continuous service improvement.

5. When asked what would have the most positive impact on their work with children, 80% of respondents noted the need for more SLPs in their community. Below is a sample of comments made in response to this question.
   - *In looking at our department caseload numbers, I estimate that we would need three times the FTE SLP staffing in order to offer service that would meet best practice guidelines for most of our clients.*
   - *More FTEs. More awareness of how much help we could give to children with communication disorders early, compared to taking more time to help them later.*
   - *Admin support for scheduling – I feel I spend too much of my time scheduling with families when this could be done by admin staff thereby freeing up my time to see more clients...*

6. When asked about the status of speech-language pathology services for preschool-age children in BC, 91 of 97 respondents expressed only concerns – with the majority of concerns relating to lack of funding, lack of SLPs, high caseloads, and ethical dilemmas with regard to the gap between the service that should be offered and the service SLPs are able to offer given staffing limitations. Below is a sample of comments made in response to this question.
   - *We are in crisis! We are giving very poor service to the children of our community. Many children who need treatment are not being treated sufficiently, or at all. This puts many of our children at risk for many educational/social/personal problems as is well documented by years of research.*
   - *I want to be able to help children to make real change that has a positive impact on their lives. Instead, I feel like I am able to provide a very thin service that may or may not be effective. I try to be honest with families regarding what their child needs versus what I can offer but I find most families to be too understanding (or have low expectations).*
   - *The provincial government is neglecting the children of this province. This is shameful. Good quality [SLP] services would help children and are not funded.*
   - *I am disappointed and ashamed.*

**Next Steps for Communication Matters**

We will continue to learn about the SLP services available to preschool-age children in BC. Thank you to the many SLPs who have offered to support us in this initiative – we will be contacting you shortly. For further information, please contact: bcaslpa@telus.net

Acknowledgements: Thank you to the BC Association of Speech-Language Pathologists and Audiologists (BCASLPA) for their support in this initiative. In particular, thank you to Janet Campbell, Zoe Grams, and the BCASLPA Public Education Committee.