



DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMIC SECURITY

Your Partner For A Stronger Arizona

DIVISION OF DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES

Sent on Behalf of DES/DDD

Delivering Quality: Occupational Therapy and Speech-Language Pathology Practices in Swallowing and Feeding

Target Audience - Qualified Vendors and Providers

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Occupational therapists (OTs) and speech-language pathologists (SLPs) are qualified to provide swallowing and feeding evaluation and treatment services within their respective scopes of practice. However, it's essential to recognize that their scopes differ, leading to distinct focus areas in evaluations and subsequent treatment approaches.

According to the American Occupational Therapy Association and the American Speech Language Hearing Association:

- OTs focus on addressing the functional aspects of daily living skills, including feeding and swallowing, within a client's overall occupational performance.
- SLPs specialize in evaluating and treating communication and swallowing disorders, including dysphagia, through their expertise in anatomy, physiology, and pathology related to the swallowing mechanism.

It is essential to understand why an OT would not utilize an SLP's evaluation of swallowing and feeding as the primary basis for developing a plan of care and providing treatment services and vice versa.

- **Scope of Practice:** While both professionals assess swallowing and feeding, their evaluations are rooted in their unique scopes of practice. An OT's evaluation emphasizes functional performance, examining how swallowing and feeding difficulties impact clients' ability to engage in meaningful daily activities and routines. Conversely, an SLP's comprehensive evaluation focuses on the anatomical and physiological aspects of swallowing, including identifying specific swallowing impairments and their underlying causes.
- **Treatment Approaches:** OTs and SLPs employ different treatment approaches based on their expertise and training. OT interventions may include modifying the environment, adaptive equipment, or teaching compensatory strategies to enhance functional feeding skills. SLP interventions, on the other hand, may involve exercises to improve swallowing function, dietary modifications, or strategies to enhance oral-motor coordination.
- **Interdisciplinary Collaboration:** Collaboration between OTs and SLPs is essential for comprehensive care. However, it's crucial to recognize that each professional brings a unique perspective to the evaluation and treatment process, contributing valuable insights from their respective disciplines.

- **Division Requirements and Standards of Excellence:** Upholding the differentiation between SLPs and OTs in swallowing and feeding evaluations and treatment services is necessary within the Division to maintain adherence to the highest standards of practice. Separate evaluations and plans of care by SLPs and OTs ensure that clients benefit from the expertise and perspectives of both disciplines, optimizing the quality and effectiveness of intervention services.

In summary, while both OTs and SLPs are qualified to address swallowing and feeding issues, Qualified Vendors and providers must respect the boundaries of each profession's scope of practice.

Utilizing an evaluation from one discipline as the primary basis for developing a plan of care and providing treatment services in the other discipline would overlook critical aspects of the client's needs and potentially compromise the effectiveness of the intervention.

Therefore, it is imperative to reiterate the requirement for separate evaluations and plans of care by OTs and SLPs. The Division must uphold the highest standards of practice and deliver optimal care to our members. Compliance with this requirement ensures the delivery of comprehensive and effective services to those we serve.

References

American Occupational Therapy Association. (2020a). AOTA 2020 occupational therapy code of ethics. *American Journal of Occupational Therapy*, 74 (Suppl. 3), Article 7413410005. <https://doi.org/10.5014/ajot.2020.74S3006>

American Speech-Language-Hearing Association. (2016). Roles of speech-language pathologists in swallowing and feeding disorders: Position statement [PDF file]. <https://www.asha.org/siteassets/publications/sp2016-00343.pdf>