

Poster

Assessing the information needs of speech therapists working in the French Community of Belgium in order to improve a course on Evidence-Based Practice at the University of Liège

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Revised abstract

Introduction

Two years ago, a course on Evidence-Based Practice (EBP) was integrated into the speech therapy curriculum at the University of Liège. We decided to carefully analyze speech therapists' needs in order to adjust the preliminary educational program to fit with current working conditions and to address challenges faced by clinical practitioners.

Questions/Objectives

The aim was to address the following questions: 1) What actions do speech therapists take to solve a clinical problem? 2) Are they satisfied with their approach? 3) To what extent do they use scientific information and what are the possible barriers to accessing it? 4) Do they know the principles of EBP? 5) Do they feel comfortable with methods of information searching? 6) Are they interested in professional training?

Methods

An exploratory survey was launched with 2028 members of two Belgian associations of French speaking speech therapists: 256 of them belonged to the “Association scientifique et éthique des logopèdes francophones” (ASELF) and 1772 others were members of the “Union Professionnelle des Logopèdes Francophones” (UPLF). The survey was also sent to 40 practitioners working in collaboration with the University of Liège as supervisors to speech therapy students.

The survey contained three types of question: questions to gain general information about the participants, questions about the process they used to solve the last problem encountered in their clinical practice and questions about how they access relevant scientific information. Several questions were in a multiple choice format, while others were opened-ended. The questionnaire was designed so that some questions did not necessarily require a response.

The questionnaire was delivered online. Practitioners were invited to participate by either an ASELF or UPLF representative, and supervisors were contacted by a professor from the University of Liège.

Results

One month after launching the survey, 520 people connected to the questionnaire. 427 people gave their answers but only 410 of those had graduated in speech therapy. When the answers given by these 410 professionals were taken into account, the participation rate rose to 19.8%.

Of the respondents, 97% had undertaken one or several processes to solve the last clinical problem that they had faced:

- 81% of people had relied on personal experience (61% of them were satisfied with the solution they had found in this way);
- 77% had discussed the clinical problem with colleagues in the workplace (81% satisfied);
- 71% had consulted their personal library (84% satisfied);
- 50% had searched scientific articles on the internet through a general search engine (e.g. Google) (71% satisfied);
- 47% had discussed the clinical problem with an expert in the discipline (94% satisfied);
- 43% had searched the internet through a general search engine (e.g. Google) to find sources of information other than articles (74% satisfied);
- 33% had discussed the clinical problem with colleagues in a professional context but not in the workplace (e.g. through a forum on the internet) (78% satisfied);
- 5% had done a search in a specialized database (e.g. Medline/PubMed) (65% satisfied);
- 5% had contacted or been to an academic library (71% satisfied);
- 5% had delegated the information search to a third party (67% satisfied);
- 3% had contacted or been to a public library (78% satisfied);
- 19% had used another approach than those cited above (80% satisfied). The most frequent answers from these respondents included: referring the patient to another professional, undertaking training, or attending a conference.

Generally speaking, 14% of the speech therapists who participated in the survey said that they used scientific information at least once a week, 37% once a month, 33% once every 3 months and 16% said they never or only exceptionally used such information.

Reported barriers to accessing scientific information were: lack of time (54%), lack of competence in the English language (45%), lack of knowledge of available sources in the discipline (44%), difficulty in accessing specialized search tools (40%), cost of accessing information (40%), difficulty in selecting relevant documents (37%), difficulty in assessing the scientific quality of information (33%), lack of skills in using specialized search tools (28%), barriers other than those cited (2%).

7% did not perceive any barrier to obtaining quality scientific information.

On a scale 1-10 (1 being the lowest level and 10 the highest level), average scores regarding perceived competence in accessing and using scientific information were as follows: searching scientific information (6.9), assessing information (6.7), using in their professional practice information obtained from the literature (7.3).

12.4% of the respondents had already heard about EBP. They rated the importance of the approach as follows: essential (15%), interesting (25%), interesting but not feasible (23%). 37% did not know enough about EBP to give an opinion.

The surveyed speech therapists indicated their training interests to be as follows: EBP training (69%), improving skills such as professional attitudes (66%), information retrieval (62%) and information on critical reading (47%).

Discussion

This preliminary analysis shows that the majority of speech therapy practitioners in our study had searched for a solution to the clinical problems they encounter.

They referred mostly to 1) experience, 2) colleagues in the workplace and 3) documents available in their personal library. The highest satisfaction levels were experienced when 1) they discussed the problem with an expert, 2) they consulted their personal library, and 3) they discussed it with a colleague in the workplace.

When searching for a journal article, the practitioners seemed to prefer a general search engine rather than a specialized database. As already reported by Nail-Chiwetelu & Bernstein Ratner (1), the most cited barriers to accessing relevant information are lack of time and ignorance of available sources in the discipline.

Whatever usage the practitioners were making of scientific information in their daily practice and whatever their self perceived level of competence in information literacy, they expressed an interest in being trained. This can be interpreted as a willingness to improve their practice and their approach to the literature.

The survey gathered a large amount of additional data, which still need to be analyzed. Nevertheless, as recommended by Guo et al. (2) and by Nail-Chiwetelu & Bernstein Ratner (1), we can already conclude that efforts need to be made to help speech therapists to develop their skills in information literacy. On the one hand, educational programs should provide EBP courses in order to anticipate the challenges of professional life. On the other hand, continuing education activities should also be offered to professionals in order to support decision making and to transform them into models for the next generation.

References

- (1) Nail-Chiwetalu B, Bernstein Ratner N. An assessment of the information-seeking abilities and needs of practicing speech-language pathologists. *J Med Libr Assoc.* 2007;95:182-8,e56-7.
 - (2) Guo R, Bain BA, Willer J. Results of an assessment of information needs among speech-language pathologists and audiologists in Idaho. *J Med Libr Assoc.* 2008;96:138-44.
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