

**THE FUNDAMENTAL ISSUE OF CONTINUING EDUCATION IN SPEECH THERAPY**

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Contacts: [talineslp@gmail.com](mailto:talineslp@gmail.com)**ABSTRACT**

Studies in medicine and sciences are constantly changing with the advancement of research and new discoveries. Continuing education in a field such as speech pathology is crucial for this reason. Most developed countries, like the United States of America and countries in Europe, make education after graduation mandatory and enforce restrictions on licenses in order to encourage people to renew them. Armenia, however, does not. For example, The American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA) requires all certificate holders (CCC-A and CCC-SLP) to maintain their ASHA Certificates of Clinical Competence and their CCC-SLP by taking additional courses every few years. Countries outside of the United States, such as Canada and Australia, have similar requirements of completing extra hours of practice and education in order to maintain the speech-language pathologist license.

Armenia also does not have a higher board or association that legally monitors and audits speech pathologists after graduation, but they should work to establish one in order to encourage and enforce speech pathologists to complete the requirements necessary to continue their practice. Armenia is trying to modernize and change the medical education system in order to advance their professional development and allow for the international mobility of healthcare workers, but they should also work to set requirements like these for the speech therapy field in Armenia. Continuing professional development allows for cardinal information that might have been forgotten over the years after graduating or receiving a license to be reviewed and recollected. With the introduction of new technologies and methods, speech pathologists need to be informed of the new ways of practice through their continuing education requirements. Speech pathologists in Armenia can use the opportunity of continuing education to learn how to use new methods such as Armav and incorporate them into their own practices.

**Keywords:** *Continuing education, speech therapy, speech-language pathologist, Armenia, American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA), professionals, practice, license, medicine,*

*certification, restrictions, requirements, College of Speech and Hearing Health Professionals of British Columbia (CSHBC), harmonize, continuing medical education (CME), European, research, technology, Alternative Augmentative Communication (AAC).*

## INTRODUCTION

Studies in medicine and sciences are constantly changing with the advancement of research and new discoveries. With science fields continually evolving, schools tend to also modify their curricula to match with the more modern and relevant information surrounding the field. However, this also means that professionals who have already graduated and earned their licenses need to know how to keep up with these changes. For work surrounding medical sciences and patient care, it is important for medical professionals to continue education even after receiving a license in the profession in order to be able to adapt their practices to match the new research.

As defined by Longworth and Davies (1996, p. 22), lifelong learning is "the development of human potential through an ongoing supportive process that motivates and enables individuals to acquire and apply with confidence, creativity, and enjoyment in all roles, circumstances, and environments the knowledge, values, skills, and understanding they will require throughout their lifetimes" Knapper (1988, p. 105) defined it more succinctly as "the capacity to acquire knowledge from one's experiences and grow as an individual over time," assuming accountability for one's own educational development.

## DISCUSSION OF THE TOPIC

In the field of patient care and medical sciences, it is critical that practitioners maintain their professional development beyond the acquisition of a license, so that they may be able to modify their methodologies to align with advancements in research. For the same reason, continuing education in a discipline such as speech pathology is essential. Many developed nations, including Europe and the United States of America, mandate postgraduate education and impose license renewal restrictions to encourage individuals to renew their licenses. Armenia, which does not mandate postgraduate education for speech therapists, should heed their example and follow suit.

My research is aimed at establishing regulations that pertain to the management and execution of assessments for certification in continuous professional development for Speech Therapists in Armenia. Armenia is among the many nations where further education is not mandatory for speech pathologists upon completion of their academic studies. Armenia possesses a robust academic education system and recognizes the significance of speech therapists in diverse domains; however, it does not possess a "unified system of continuous education" (Babayan, 2021). To remain current with the latest pertinent information in the field of speech therapy, a speech pathologist in Armenia must possess intrinsic

motivation and determination, as there is no external pressure to do so to maintain their licenses or secure employment.

Developed nations, such as the United States of America, have a strict system of continuing education in place, which persists beyond the attainment of a license and graduation, in contrast to Armenia. Medical professionals in disciplines such as speech therapy are required to demonstrate ongoing learning and education every few years to maintain their license to practice. This can be accomplished through various means, including attending educational conferences or enrolling in online courses. The American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA) offers various continuing education opportunities to all certificate holders (CCC-A and CCC-SLP). To maintain their ASHA Certificates of Clinical Competence, these individuals must fulfill a thirty-hour professional development requirement every three years (Requirements for Maintaining Your ASHA Certification, n.d.).

ASHA Certification Maintenance specifies the interval for maintenance. The completion of twenty-four hours of continuing education every two years, which corresponds to the time during which the license is renewed, is one of the additional conditions that must be met to complete the CCC-SLP (California Licensing Requirements for Audiologists and Speech-Language Pathologists, n.d.). Those who possess dual licenses and those who are licensed to practice audiology are subject to even more strict criteria for continuing education. Each of these requirements must be satisfied to follow the American Society of Health-System Administrators' (ASHA) code of ethics, which states that "Individuals shall engage in lifelong learning that is relevant to their professional activities and skills in order to enhance and refine their professional competence and expertise" (ASHA Code of Ethics Principle of Ethics II, n.d.).

There are professional bodies in every European nation that regulate the practice of speech therapy and jobs that are related to language therapy. For instance, in Australia, provisional and practicing speech-language pathologists have a minimum requirement of two hours of learning with professional support as well as two hours of cultural learning, all part of twenty hours of learning per membership year (Continuing Professional Development Requirements, 2023). Regulating the practice of speech therapy is a provincial or territorial institution or college in Canada. College of Speech and Hearing Health Professionals of British Columbia (CSHBC) and College of Audiologists and Speech-Language Pathologists of Ontario (CASLPO) are two organizations that are responsible for establishing standards, licenses, and continuing education prerequisites for speech-language pathologists in Canada. CSHBC, for example, requires a minimum of forty-five hours of Cs, or continuing competency credits, within a 3-year cycle is required for the first registration held. They even have additional restrictions on the number of credits that need to be earned following each topic (CSHBC Attaining and Maintaining

Practice Competence, 2023).

Under the Soviet Union, Armenia had centralized recertification and continuing education requirements for doctors and healthcare workers to implement in their practice. However, once Armenia gained their independence from the Soviet Union, these practices became lost. Currently, Armenia is trying to modernize and change the medical education system in order to advance their professional development and allow for the international mobility of healthcare workers (Chekijian et al., 2020). Speech therapy in Armenia needs to get on board with this modernization.

Armenia is making efforts to harmonize their CME, or continuing medical education, with the Europeans because doing so will allow Armenian healthcare workers to take advantage of learning and advancement opportunities abroad in Europe. If Armenia's CME/CPD model harmonizes with Europe's, then credits can be obtained at university hospitals and research centers abroad (Chekijian et al., 2020). Armenia's CME/CPD requirements for the medical-related fields include 220 credits every 5 years in order to recertify, however, there are no further specialty-based requirements. Requirements vary depending on the field, for example, pharmacists need 160 credits, nurses need 140, and pharmacists' assistants need 100 (Chekijian et al., 2020). Unlike the medical field, Armenia does not have a regulated CME program for speech therapy. The incorporation of a regulated CME program and harmonization with the European CME program is important to allow mobility speech therapists to study abroad and easily return back to their practice in Armenia. Continuing education in nations such as the United States not only makes continuing education mandatory, but also informs speech-language pathologists that they may be audited by associations such as ASHA and the Speech-language Pathology, Audiology and Hearing Aid Dispensers Board. This enforces stricter regulations that ensure and encourage a speech pathologist is complete their necessary amount of CCCs. Armenia, however, does not have a higher board or association that legally monitors speech pathologists after graduation, so it is up to the individual to decide whether they want to continue education independently, or not.

### **IMPLICATION INTO PRACTICE**

Continuing education is so strictly imposed in advanced nations such as the United States, Canada, Europe, and more because it is crucial for both medical professionals and speech-language pathologists in their field. Continuing professional development, or CPD, allows for cardinal information that might have been forgotten over the years after graduating or receiving a license to be reviewed and recollected. However, recollection is only an additional benefit of continuing education; the main reason why nations require continuing education in fields such as speech pathology is because it is constantly evolving. With the introduction to new technologies and methods, speech pathologists need to be informed of the new ways of practice through their continuing education requirements because "what is considered to be the

best knowledge one day may later be found to be inadequate” (Continuing Professional Development: Building and Sustaining a Quality Workforce, 2010).

Acquiring the skill of successful learning is imperative for individuals working in scientific or medical disciplines. To support patients more effectively, it is critical to assimilate the new information uncovered by the ongoing advances in medical research and adapt clinical procedures to incorporate this modern knowledge. As an effort to promote the career-critical nature of lifelong, self-directed learning, numerous medical institutions instruct students on how to acquire knowledge independently and effectively utilize resources. Acquiring the ability to learn how to learn not only facilitates professionals' comprehension of formal education but also empowers them to derive value from their daily lives by equipping them with the critical and analytical capacity to evaluate such experiences and derive insights from them (Alsop, 2013). It is imperative that medical practitioners maintain an insatiable curiosity regarding their fields and "assume accountability for their own professional growth in consideration of their career objectives" (Alsop, 2013).

Continuing education can also be a way for practicing speech pathologists to become familiar with and certified to use new technologies in their field. In the United States and other European countries, there are advanced methods of Alternative Augmentative Communication, or AAC, that are used in practices in order to help nonverbal patients speak. Armenia has recently developed their first AAC application called Armav to help familiarize the nonverbal Armenian population as a means of communicating with their loved ones in their native tongue (Armav. app). Speech pathologists in Armenia can use the opportunity of continuing education to learn how to use new methods such as Armav and incorporate them into their own practices.

## CONCLUSION

Even being informed with the most up-to-date knowledge and education, medical professionals will never truly understand everything pertaining to their field because a lot of information may not be discovered yet. For this reason, it ought to be obligatory for medical professionals and speech pathologists in every nation to be able to educate themselves on the most recent discoveries and to be able to examine information that is both outdated and still pertinent. They need to be aware of how to modify their procedures so that they are compatible with the contemporary research that is considered acceptable today. Making it essential for medical professionals to renew their licenses and participate in continuing education, will encourage them to remain current with their practices, which will ultimately result in environments that are more efficient and provide better care to patients.

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