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Professional Development Opportunities as a Student

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Professional development is critical to career growth and in today's dynamic work environment. Professional development involves actively seeking opportunities to enhance skills, staying current with industry trends, and expanding knowledge regarding the field of audiology. Reflective practice is an example of a skill used to assist with professional development. Reflective practice is known to improve job performance by identifying new learning opportunities. Audiologists who commit to ongoing development can effectively navigate changes leading to competitive advantages for the duration of their careers.

I interviewed three audiologists from across Canada to share their insights regarding their perspective on professional development. Questions asked of these clinicians focused on opportunities for students and opportunities for entry to practice clinicians.

> Q. Which strategies do you use to help develop rapport with your patients/clients?

Professional 1: As a student, my most underdeveloped skills were case history and counseling patients. I knew what I needed to ask, but in the moment when the patient was in front of me, the discussion wouldn't flow naturally. I was asking questions from a list like a robot, unable to deviate from the fixed conversational path in my head without blanking. I found that repetition naturally makes it easier; as a new clinician, ***I recommend role-playing with anyone willing to be a "patient." Practice going through your case history, common patient concerns, and counselling.*** I found that once my confidence grew, I could hold more meaningful conversations and connect with my patients, which helped me build rapport.

Professional 2: My biggest advice is to treat your patient as a person; when you first interact with the individual, especially as a student, you are nervous. ***Treating them as normal can help develop rapport and make you and your patient more comfortable.***

Professional 3: I would say gaining your patient's trust is very important. If their best interests are not in mind, they won't listen to what you say. ***Listening to the patients' concerns and telling them you are there to help them develop rapport and not rushing through the appointment.*** Patients respect this, and I have experienced them appreciating that I am taking my time and looking after their problem from a personable point of view.

> Q. Do you have strategies for building trust with your patient/client/individual with hearing impairment? If trust is lost, how do you work to re-establish that trust?

Professional 2: At Costco, there is no commission and no quota to sell; this is used as a fallback to emphasize that you are recommending in their best interest and not in the interest of the audiologist. ***Set expectations lower than you probably should, to result in having surprise rather than disappointment.***

Professional 3: Loss of trust is inevitable, as sometimes you make mistakes or the patient has unreasonable expectations. ***Don't make excuses, people don't want to hear excuses, own up to your mistakes.*** People will understand that even professionals make mistakes; you must try to regain your patients' trust. Sometimes you cannot restore trust, and in this case, you must put aside your ego and do what is best for the patient, such as giving them to a coworker.

Professional 1: In clinic, I've found that confidence is everything. If you have the proper knowledge and skillset, it will show in your work and conversations. When I first meet a patient, the instinct is always to get through the list of things needed for the appointment. It's important to slow down and recognize that the patient is human with real feelings and hesitations. Sit down with them, ask about their personal life, reflect with them on how they feel when they're in difficult hearing situations. ***I find that when you take a breath and just listen to them, you'll find that they're naturally inclined to trust you because you make them feel both seen and heard.*** Using the acronym FORM to guide your conversations is an excellent way to build rapport and get the necessary information. Family – Who do they live with? Do they have relatives in the area? Is there a family history of hearing loss? Occupation – What do they do for work? Is there noise exposure? Recreation – What do they like to do for fun? Again, any noise exposure there? Are they isolating themselves because they find they're embarrassed asking for repetition all the time? Motivation/Money - Why did they come in to see you today and not sooner? What motivates them to get tested? / What is their financial situation like? Could they qualify for WSIB? ***Patients are receptive to open and honest clinicians***, and if you show that you did your best to help them, they will understand. If you ever break trust with a patient, that can be hard. I've been fortunate enough to not have that happen, but I think the best course of action is to fix the mistake that caused mistrust in the first place.

> Q. Have you gained benefit from seminars addressing professional development skills? Which specific seminars would you recommend to others?

Professional 3: I was in the audiology program during Covid-19, so there were few seminars opportunities. ***Volunteering opportunities and anything that will help interact with people professionally may be helpful.*** Getting involved is key.

Professional 1: I have been fortunate enough to attend many training and professional development opportunities in my short career. I***t doesn't matter which seminar or event you attend; what is most important is the knowledge you gain from your fellow audiology peers.*** Many events throughout Canada and the United States bring hearing healthcare professionals together, so I advise attending as many as you can. They are fun learning experiences that give insight on the field and allow networking opportunities to meet like-minded individuals.

Professional 2: I attended the annual CAA conference; my advice is to network as much as you can and attend all of the seminars. ***I suggest speaking with various hearing aid brand representatives***

and asking questions, especially regarding brands you are less familiar with.

> Q. What skills do you think are crucial for professional development?

Professional 2: I think that being empathetic is the most important skill in this profession. ***Confidence in what you are counselling and in your equipment*** is also essential. Networking for the non-clinical part of audiology (outside of your own clinic) may also benefit professional development.

Professional 3: Number one is reflective practice; you should always be thinking about what went well today, what didn't go well, and this can lead to becoming a better clinician. ***Always thinking about improving will allow you to grow your knowledge base and grow as a professional***. Additionally, being able to take constructive feedback, or feedback in general, is important for growth. Taking things personally rather than in a constructive manner is not really a good thing. Regardless of where you work you will be working with other people, so being open to feedback is important for growing as a professional.

Professional Development while Transitioning to Clinical Practice

> Q. What formal/informal training did you have when you transitioned to practice that you would recommend to others?

Professional 1: The training I received in my practice shockingly had nothing to do with audiology, but rather how to better communicate. It focused on how to talk to patients and build rapport with role-playing activities for practice. I'll admit it was strange to receive training about something "outside" of the field, but I realized that there is more to being a clinician than just having general audiological knowledge. If future clinicians ever get the opportunity to attend seminars or lectures about communication, I'd highly recommend it. They will find that conversations with patients will go much smoother and their confidence will grow.

Professional 2: Costco has a lot of audiologists; being mentored by them was great and they made the transition seamless. ***I think that taking advantage of when you can ask questions is a very good thing***. I started with formal training in the form of shadowing, and then took on cases and asked questions as I progressed.

Professional 3: My formal training was one week long; my family owns the clinic I work at, and I had already worked there administratively. Shadowing at a clinic is important as all clinics (private, public, etc.) operate differently, so the more experience you have and working under as many professionals will help you through getting exposure. ***I would also strongly recommend looking at sources for other training, such as manufacturers hosting webinars*** on different topics. It is a requirement for continuing education through CALSPO, so I suggest learning as much as you can and staying on top of new technology and new research. The annual CAA conference was also extremely valuable. If you are interested in specific audiology areas, many specialized resources and courses are available.

> Q. What insights do you have regarding equity, diversity, inclusion, and the role of EDI training in the field of audiology?

Professional 3: You want to be comfortable working with people from all different backgrounds as you will see a diverse range of individuals. It is important to know them and know how to interact; you need to be mindful of some things. Different manufacturers offer many good resources.

Professional 1: In school, many of my classes focused on EDI and how to address it in practice. When I started clinic, I was exposed to many different people walking through my doors. Given the knowledge that I was equipped with, I found it easily applicable in practice. However, the trouble was dealing with these issues from someone's history. I've had some patients confide in me about how they struggle to trust healthcare professionals due to negative past experiences. As a woman of colour, I can both relate and empathize. Our role is to provide patient-centered care and advocate for them in times of need. ***The ability to identify systemic inequality and discrimination is important***, because without it, more patients will continue to fall through the cracks and not receive the help they deserve. Healthcare professionals should learn about EDI and the implications of not addressing this pressing concern. This is not specific to audiology alone.

> Q. Which professional development concepts do you wish you had learned more thoroughly before transitioning into practice?

Professional 3: You don't know how important professional skills are until you experience working alone in a clinic. When you realize this, you realize that you should always strive to get better. It is hard to adapt from being a full-time student to being a full-time audiologist, especially when studying for the CETP. One very important concept that I focus on is reflective practice.

Professional 1: While in school, I've always had a supervisor or professor looking out for me in clinic. I could turn to this person when I was having trouble with a patient, and someone who made the decisions. When I entered practice, nobody really prepared me for the feeling of doing things alone. Now, I know I had my mentor, my coworkers, and I could have reached out to classmates or old supervisors. However, in the moment, the recommendations and decision that you make with a patient is your own, and you are responsible for the well-being of their hearing health. Looking back, ***I wish I had focused on taking the initiative to problem-solve rather than immediately go to a supervisor with questions***, because this is an essential skill when you're in clinic. As a student, this can be difficult because supervisors are there to guide you, but I still believe that being able to do things on your own is a good step into clinical practice where you need to make on-the-spot decisions daily.

> Q. Do you feel like your audiology program prepared you with the necessary skills for a fluid transition to practice?

Professional 2: Absolutely. I felt confident in my professional ability after my first placement, nevertheless in completing my program. Nobody feels 100% confident when they finish school, but you will have the necessary support when you start working.

Professional 1: My audiology program was more than adequate in teaching me how to be a good

clinician. I do suggest spending some time looking over the rules and regulations of the licensure body as well as what to expect in terms of government paperwork. In Ontario, there are common forms that clinicians will need to fill, submit, and keep track of such as ADP, WSIB, DVA, ODSP/ACSD, along different health insurance companies. There is a lot to know about government forms, and one mistake can cost you come audit time, so knowing the rules and regulations from your licensure body and the funding programs is very important and a necessary skill.

Professional 3: The audiology program gives you the knowledge base to get started. There is a big difference between getting started as an audiologist and being a completely competent clinician; taking constructive feedback to heart and reflective practice is essential. You can't just be content with what you learn in school; it is a journey and you should always strive to improve as a clinician. Resources are available to improve professional development skills and getting a good mentor can help.

Professional development in audiology is crucial for maintaining the highest standards of care and advancing the practice. As technology and research evolve, audiologists must keep in touch with the latest advancements while continuing to develop professionally. Engaging in continuous learning through workshops, conferences, and specialized training enhances clinical skills, fosters innovation, and improves patient outcomes. Membership with the CAA provides many professional development opportunities, including exclusive networking events, specialized training programs, and industry insights that can enhance your skills and advance your career. Through committing to ongoing professional growth, audiologists ensure they are equipped to meet the complex needs of their patients and contribute to the overall progression of the field, ultimately enhancing the quality of life for those they serve.