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PERSPECTIVES OF CERTIFIED NURSING ASSISTANTS ON THEIR KNOWLEDGE OF
COMMUNICATION DISORDERS IN NURSING HOME RESIDENTS

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ABSTRACT

The influence of a communication disorder on a person depends primarily on the services provided by a speech-language pathologist, but also by the communication partners the individual has. When working with someone with any communication disorder, the healthcare provider needs to be knowledgeable on how to effectively serve that individual. The communication disorders of dysphagia, tinnitus, and presbycusis can frequently go unnoticed due to their unobservable nature, especially when the residents have been diagnosed with other comorbid communication disorders.

Nursing home residents can see a number of healthcare providers in a single day, including numerous physicians, therapists, and nurses. However, the primary provider of care within a nursing home is a certified nursing assistant. This became motivation to survey 15 certified nursing assistants working within nursing homes on their knowledge of communication disorders.

Based on previous literature, the biggest problem facing certified nursing assistants is that their knowledge of communication disorders is limited in terms of safety, skills, and communication. Gaps in their knowledge about these disorders may lead to health issues and decline in general well-being. Through survey these issues are reported, as well as addressing the importance of communication disorders on their career, and where they learned what they presently know about these disorders.

Survey findings indicate that there is a gap in the knowledge of communication disorders shown by certified nursing assistants. 100% of participants agreed that knowledge of communication, swallowing, and hearing disorders are important to their career as a certified nursing assistant. Participants also acknowledge that they often work with residents with these disorders, however a large percentage indicate that they do not have an understanding of these disorders or how to serve those with these disorders. Another finding by the study is that a proportion of participants felt they learned the about these disorders while on the job, or not at all.

In the future, observing certified nursing assistants to determine what communication disorders skills should be taught in training could allow for greater health and quality of life in nursing home residents. All communication disorders found within nursing home residents should be trained and assessed. Finally, this data could be used to advocate for additional training for certified nursing assistants.

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Chapter 1

Review of Literature

The Certified Nursing Assistant in the Nursing Home

The National Center for Health Statistics report that in 2013, there were 1.4 million residents residing within 15,700 nursing homes (Harris-Kojetin, 2013). The Bureau of Labor Statistics estimated 622,850 certified nursing assistants provide care to these residents (2014).

The certified nursing assistant provides basic care and support to residents in medical environments, including nursing homes. Their duties may include dressing, bathing, feeding, transporting residents, and monitoring and reporting changes in vital signs, behaviors, or personality. However, since they are not licensed nurses they are unable to administer medication and perform diagnostic tests (2014).

Communication Disorders in the Nursing Home

Data collected by the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association's National Outcomes Measurement System (NOMS) reported that the majority (68.4%) of residents within a nursing home have a diagnosis of dysphagia. Their data also found that most patients within the facilities received speech therapy services around 5 days a week (2011).

A study of two nursing homes in 1992 found that of 121 residents 77% had at least a mild hearing loss, and 51% had a moderate to severe loss. They also found that residents should have hearing evaluations periodically given by a nurse trained as a hearing specialist. And also environmental modifications of the nursing home and the distribution of hearing aids can improve hearing (Garahan, Waller, Houghton, Tisdale, & Runge, 1992).

The Role of Certified Nursing Assistants on Communication Disorders

Dysphagia is life threatening when resulting in aspiration pneumonia. Being that certified nursing assistants routinely feed residents they need a greater knowledge of dysphagia and how to feed residents before beginning work. Also, certified nursing assistants provide the residents oral hygiene, oral health must be properly addressed in training. Oral health care providers, play a critical role in the early identification of oral ailments that may predispose an individual to certain medical conditions. Also, providing adequate oral care will improve the overall health of this fragile population.

Communication disorders are quite common in those over 65, over 16 million Medicare beneficiaries report having a communication disability. In a survey by Hoffman et al. hearing problems were most commonly reported 41.99% by their participants. They also found a significant association between dissatisfaction with their medical care when a communication disability was diagnosed (Hoffman, Yorkston, Shumway-Cook, Ciol, Dudgeon, & Chan, 2005).

An Overview of the Training of Certified Nursing Assistants

Gaps in current knowledge were shown when looking at the current curriculum of certified nursing assistant training programs. Looking at the Nurse Aide Candidate Handbook provided by the National Nurse Aide Assessment Program, no skills are testing in the area of communication disorders. The only skills related to communication at all are “cleans upper and lower denture”, “provides mouth care”, “feeds client who cannot feed self”. Even though feeding is addressed in the skills assessment the steps of completing the skill are vague and focus primarily on the resident’s upright sitting position (2015). There is no mention of knowing if the resident has dysphagia. Another area missing in the skills assessment is communication with the resident, especially if the resident has any degree of hearing loss. All of these disorders hinder the process of communication. The ability to communicate should not be taken away from the residents due to lack of training of certified nursing assistants.

Certified Nursing Assistants Training Related to Communication Disorders

Studies of certified nursing assistants have shown that their knowledge of communication disorders is limited in terms of safety, skills, and communication. These studies have helped illuminate that this limited knowledge may be causing problems related to aspiration pneumonia, oral health care, communication abilities, and general well-being. Several articles were studied to determine what information certified nursing assistants had learned from training programs compared to on the job experience.

The study “What do Certified Nurse Assistants Actually Know about Dysphagia and Feeding Nursing Home Residents?” by Pelletier (2004) examines the effect of understanding when a resident has difficulty swallowing and how to properly feed them. Individuals who depend on a certified nursing assistant are more likely to acquire aspiration pneumonia than those who independently feed themselves. Results of this study found that certified nursing assistants’ knowledge of feeding was limited, and only 34% of participants correctly identified the signs and symptoms of dysphagia (Pelletier, 2004).

The study “The Importance of Oral Health in Long-Term Care” by Haumschild and Haumschild (2009) validates why oral health should be a priority. There is believed to be a correlation between oral health and general health. Results found that certified nursing assistants often receive limited and insufficient education on proper oral care, given the average time devoted to dental procedures training is only 30 minutes (Haumschild & Haumschild, 2009). Clinical consequences occur if oral care is not properly addressed. Inflammation affects structures of the mouth, and other areas of the body. Furthermore, aspiration and ventilator-associated pneumonia result from poor oral care.

“Reducing the Risk of Aspiration Pneumonia among Elderly Patients in Long-Term Care Facilities through Oral Health Interventions” by Sarin, Balasubramaniam, Corcoran, Laudenschlager, and Stoopler (2008) illustrates the cause and effect relationship between aspiration pneumonia and oral health. It is suggested that poor oral health care increases the risk for aspiration pneumonia in the elderly residing in long-term care facilities. Evidence found that certain microbacterium present in plaque of patients with

poor oral hygiene can also be found in the lungs of patients with aspiration pneumonia (Sarin et al., 2008).

“Therapeutic communication training in long-term care institutions: Recommendations for future research” conducted by Levy-Stroms (2008) was a comparison of the strengths and weaknesses of intervention using therapeutic communication. Nurses should improve therapeutic communication techniques, the face-to-face process of interacting that focuses on advancing the physical and emotional well-being of a patient. 90% of care is provided by a certified nursing assistant, however it was found that they initiate little communication during their interactions with residents (Levy-Stroms, 2008). Therapeutic communication techniques can be taught and can increase the quality of life for staff and older adults. Residents can then use critical verbal and non-verbal communication behaviors. These include open-ended questions, positive statements, eye contact, affective touch, and smiling. Using these will allow them to express themselves to a greater extent through communication.

Purpose of the Study

Together, these studies focus on where training of certified nursing assistants is limited in terms of communication disorders. Training appears to be limited on the disorders of dysphagia, tinnitus, and presbycusis.

Pelletier (2004) helps to determine that there is a problem in the area of feeding and dysphagia. This study provides strong evidence that certified nursing assistants show gaps in their knowledge of dysphagia and how to feed residents. However, it does note that increased knowledge does not mean feeding practices will improve. Nonetheless, their article successfully demonstrates the need for more research on this topic.

In contrast, the two articles by Haumschild and Hamschild (2009), and Sarin et al. (2008) expand upon the importance of oral health. They not only address the consequences of poor oral health, but also

explain how increased training can be used to combat this lack of knowledge. Specifically, Haumschild and Haumschild validate the correlation between oral health and general health. Sarin et al. verifies the relationship between oral health and aspiration pneumonia. Although resources may be limited in some long-term care facilities, incorporating an outlined oral care recommendation and providing adequate oral care will improve the overall health of this population. However, there is a need for more high-quality, randomized, and controlled clinical trials.

Additionally, the article by Levy-Stroms (2008) successfully examines how therapeutic communication can be used by certified nursing assistants to advance the physical and emotional needs of their residents. All of the information and evidence drawn from these articles should be taken into consideration when determining what areas of training programs need to be strengthened.

The purpose of this study is to determine certified nursing assistants' knowledge of communication disorders using a survey. Communication disorders that will be addressed are dysphagia, presbycusis, and tinnitus. The survey will measure if certified nursing assistants have worked with residents with these disorders, were trained to serve residents with these disorders, and if they feel they have an understanding of these disorders. This survey will also determine where the certified nursing assistant learned what they know about these communication disorders.

Patients of certified nursing assistants with lack of communication disorders suffer, because they have limited knowledge of how to treat their patients. As found in these articles, training of certified nursing assistants needs to be reinforced in multiple areas. Evidence has shown that knowledge of feeding practices, oral health, and communication is limited, and often not addressed in training programs. Making improvements in these areas will benefit each resident within long-term care facilities. Residents will receive higher quality care, resulting in a higher quality of health and wellbeing. Although more research is needed, the training of certified nursing assistants appears to be substandard.

Chapter 2

Methods

Procedures

Each survey consisted of the same 21 items, and was distributed to the certified nursing assistants at Foxdale Village Retirement Community in State College, Pennsylvania. The survey was titled, “Communication Disorders & CNAs’ Working in a Nursing Home”. It included four sections, Demographic Information, Your Impressions, Your Understanding of Communication Disorders, and Where did you learn that?.

In order to contact as many certified nursing assistants as possible, Meg Clouser, Director of Health Services at Foxdale Village was contacted to distribute information about the survey to employed certified nursing assistants. A flyer describing the survey was placed throughout Foxdale Village.

Participants were informed that the research was being conducted by The Pennsylvania State University, through the Summary Explanation of Research, provided by the Pennsylvania State University Institutional Review Board. Participants were informed of the purpose of the study, that their participation was voluntary, completion of the survey served as their consent to participate, no identifying information would be recorded, and they reserve the right to not answer any question they do not wish to answer. Any questions or concerns were to be directed to my thesis advisor, Dr. Ingrid Blood, Ph.D. Professor and Schreyer Honors College Advisor for the Department of Communication Sciences and Disorders.

Certified nursing assistants completed the survey between changing shifts from 2 to 4 PM in a conference room at Foxdale Village. The survey took no longer than 5 minutes to complete. For their time

the participants each received a 10 dollar gift card. A total of 15 surveys were distributed and 15 responses were recorded, providing a response rate of 100%.

Survey Items

The survey was developed and approved by The Pennsylvania State University Institutional Review Board. The survey contained 21 questions, offering instructions of “Circle your response” and “Fill in your response”. The surveys were completed in person, on paper, at Foxdale Village.

Survey items were created to determine their impressions of the importance of communication disorders, their understanding and experience working with residents with communication disorders, and to gauge in what setting they learned the most about these disorders. Communication disorders that were addressed were dysphagia, tinnitus, and presbycusis.

Chapter 3

Results and Conclusions

Results

<i>Gender</i>		
Answer	Response	% of Responses
Male	1	7%
Female	14	93%
TOTAL	15	100%

Table 1. Gender of Participants

<i>Race/Ethnicity</i>		
Answer	Response	% of Responses
African American	1	7%
Hispanic	0	0%
Asian American	0	0%
Native American	0	0%
Caucasian	14	93%
TOTAL	15	100%

Table 2. Race/Ethnicity of Participants

<i>Current Caseload</i>		
Answer	Response	% of Responses
7	3	20%
8	1	7%
12	2	13%
14	2	13%
15	3	20%
16	2	13%
22	1	7%
52	1	7%
TOTAL	15	100%

Table 3. Current Caseload of Participants

<i>Highest Degree Earned</i>		
Answer	Response	% of Responses
GED	1	7%
High School	5	33%
Some College	7	47%
Associate Degree	1	7%
Bachelor Degree	1	7%
Other	0	0%
TOTAL	15	100%

Table 4. Highest Degree Earned by Participants

<i>Current Age</i>		
Answer	Response	% of Responses
18	2	13%
20	1	7%
24	2	13%
25	1	7%
27	1	7%
29	1	7%
41	1	7%
43	1	7%
51	2	13%
52	2	13%
61	1	7%
TOTAL	15	100%

Table 5. Current Age of Participants

<i>Number of Years Working as a CNA</i>		
Answer	Response	% of Responses
1	2	13%
2	2	13%
3	1	7%
4	1	7%
6	4	27%
9	1	7%
13	1	7%
15	1	7%
31	1	7%
35	1	7%
TOTAL	15	100%

Table 6. Number of Years Working as a CNA by Participants

A total of 15 certified nursing assistants were surveyed. Of those surveyed, 14 were female, and 1 was male. In regards to race and ethnicity, 14 were Caucasian and 1 was African American. When asked about their current caseload, the responses ranged from 7 to 52. 47% of participants reported some college completed when asked about their highest degree earned, and 33% reported a high school degree. While earning a GED, Associated Degree, and Bachelor's Degree were each reported once. The age of participants ranged from 18 to 61, with the average age being 36. When asked about the number of years they have worked as a certified nursing assistant, responses ranged from 1 year to 35 years, while the average response was 9 years.

<i>How important do you think knowledge of communication problems is to your career?</i>		
Answer	Response	% of Responses
Not important	0	0%
Sometimes important	0	0%
Very important	15	100%
TOTAL	15	100%

Table 7. How important do you think knowledge of communication problems is to your career?

<i>How important do you think knowledge of swallowing problems is to your career?</i>		
Answer	Response	% of Responses
Not important	0	0%
Sometimes important	0	0%
Very important	15	100%
TOTAL	15	100%

Table 8. How important do you think knowledge of swallowing problems is to your career?

<i>How important do you think knowledge of hearing problems is to your career?</i>		
Answer	Response	% of Responses
Not important	0	0%
Sometimes important	0	0%
Very important	15	100%
TOTAL	15	100%

Table 9. How important do you think knowledge of hearing problems is to your career?

In the section titled “Your Impressions”, questions were asked about the importance of communication disorders, swallowing disorders, and hearing disorders in their career. Each of the three questions received a response rate of 100% for the answer “Very Important”.

<i>Have you ever worked with residents diagnosed with Dysphagia?</i>		
Answer	Response	% of Responses
Yes	14	93%
No	0	0%
Unsure	1	7%
TOTAL	15	100%

Table 10. Have you ever worked with residents diagnosed with Dysphagia?

<i>Were you trained on what skills to use when working with a resident with Dysphagia?</i>		
Answer	Response	% of Responses
Yes	10	67%
No	4	27%
Unsure	1	7%
TOTAL	15	100%

Table 11. Were you trained on what skills to use when working with a resident diagnosed with Dysphagia?

<i>Do you feel you have an understanding of Dysphagia?</i>		
Answer	Response	% of Responses
Yes	12	80%
No	0	0%
Unsure	3	20%
TOTAL	15	100%

Table 12. Do you feel you have an understanding of Dysphagia?

When participants were asked about their understanding of dysphagia, they reported that 93% of them had worked with a resident diagnosed with dysphagia. One participant reported that they were unsure if they had worked with this population. 67% of participants reported that they were trained on what skills to use when working with a resident diagnosed with dysphagia. However, 27% reported that they had not received any training on dysphagia, and 7% reported they were unsure. 80% of participants

felt they had an understanding of dysphagia, while 20% were unsure. For the first question on dysphagia, a brief definition of dysphagia, difficulty or discomfort in swallowing, was presented on the survey.

<i>Have you ever worked with residents diagnosed with Tinnitus?</i>		
Answer	Response	% of Responses
Yes	5	33%
No	6	40%
Unsure	4	27%
TOTAL	15	100%

Table 13. Have you ever worked with residents diagnosed with Tinnitus?

<i>Were you trained on what skills to use when working with a resident with Tinnitus?</i>		
Answer	Response	% of Responses
Yes	6	40%
No	9	60%
Unsure	0	0%
TOTAL	15	100%

Table 14. Were you trained on what skills to use when working with a resident with Tinnitus?

<i>Do you feel you have an understanding of Tinnitus?</i>		
Answer	Response	% of Responses
Yes	8	53%
No	2	13%
Unsure	5	33%
TOTAL	15	100%

Table 15. Do you feel you have an understanding of Tinnitus?

When participants were asked about their understanding of tinnitus, they reported that 33% of them had worked with a resident diagnosed with tinnitus. 40% reported that they had not worked with this population, and 27% were unsure. 40% of participants reported that they were trained on what skills to use when working with a resident diagnosed with tinnitus. However, 60% reported that they had not received any training on tinnitus. 53% of participants felt they had an understanding of tinnitus, while 13% felt they did not have an understanding of this disorder, and 33% responded that they were unsure.

For the first question on tinnitus, a brief definition of tinnitus, ringing or buzzing in the ears, was presented on the survey.

<i>Have you ever worked with residents diagnosed with Presbycusis?</i>		
Answer	Response	% of Responses
Yes	14	93%
No	0	0%
Unsure	1	7%
TOTAL	15	100%

Table 16. Have you ever worked with residents diagnosed with Presbycusis?

<i>Were you trained on what skills to use when working with a resident with Presbycusis?</i>		
Answer	Response	% of Responses
Yes	10	67%
No	4	27%
Unsure	1	7%
TOTAL	15	100%

Table 17. Were you trained on what skills to use when working with a resident with Presbycusis?

<i>Do you feel you have an understanding of Presbycusis?</i>		
Answer	Response	% of Responses
Yes	10	67%
No	3	20%
Unsure	2	13%
TOTAL	15	100%

Table 18. Do you feel you have an understanding of Presbycusis?

When asked about their understanding of presbycusis, participants reported that 93% of them had worked with a resident diagnosed with presbycusis. 7% reported that they were unsure if they had worked with this population. 67% of participants reported that they were trained on what skills to use when working with a resident diagnosed with presbycusis. Though, 27% reported that they had not received any training on presbycusis, and 7% were unsure. 67% of participants felt they had an understanding of presbycusis, while 20% felt they did not have an understanding of this disorder, and 13% responded that

they were unsure. For the first question on presbycusis, a brief definition of presbycusis, gradual hearing loss that commonly occurs as people age, was presented on the survey.

<i>Where did you learn what you know about Dysphagia?</i>		
Answer	Response	% of Responses
On the job training	10	50%
Experience on the job	5	25%
Outside Research	1	5%
Other	4	20%
TOTAL	20	100%

Table 19. Where did you learn what you know about Dysphagia?

<i>Where did you learn what you know about Tinnitus?</i>		
Answer	Response	% of Responses
On the job training	5	31%
Experience on the job	5	31%
Outside Research	2	13%
Other	4	25%
TOTAL	16	100%

Table 20. Where did you learn what you know about Tinnitus?

<i>Where did you learn what you know about Presbycusis?</i>		
Answer	Response	% of Responses
On the job training	10	56%
Experience on the job	4	22%
Outside Research	2	11%
Other	2	11%
TOTAL	18	100%

Table 21. Where did you learn what you know about Presbycusis?

In the section titled “Where did you learn that?”, participants were able to select as many responses as they felt were applicable. When asked about where they learned about dysphagia, 50% reported on the job training, 25% reported experience on the job, and 5% reported outside research. 4 participants responded with other, and their written responses included LPN school, CNA class, or that

they hadn't learned it at all. When asked the same question about tinnitus, 31% reported on the job training, 31% reported experience on the job, and 13% reported outside research. Once again 4 participants responded with other. 2 recorded CNA class, and 2 reported that they hadn't learned about it at all.

Conclusions

It should be noted that 100% of participants reported that having an understanding of communication problems, swallowing problems, and hearing problems is very important to their career as a certified nursing assistant. However, when asked if they felt they had an understanding of these disorders or were trained to work with residents with these disorders not all participants agreed that they understand these disorders or were trained on what skills to use when working with residents with these disorders.

Table 22. Importance and understanding of Dysphagia

		<i>Do you have an understanding of Dysphagia?</i>			TOTAL
		Yes	No	Unsure	
<i>How important do you think knowledge of swallowing problems is to your career?</i>	Very Important	12	0	3	15
	Sometimes Important	0	0	0	0
	Not Important	0	0	0	0
TOTAL		12	0	3	15

When asked about the importance of swallowing problems on their career, 100% of participants responded with the answer "Very Important". This shows true when looking at the responses to the question, "Have you ever worked with residents diagnosed with dysphagia?". All participants agreed that they have worked with this population, except one responded that they were unsure. When asked they felt

they had an understanding of dysphagia, the majority (80%) of participants agreed that they have an understanding. Yet 3 participants (20%) were unsure of their understanding. This shows a gap between the importance of dysphagia to their career and their understanding of this disorder.

Table 23. Importance and training of Tinnitus

		<i>Were you trained on what skills to use when working with a resident diagnosed with Tinnitus?</i>			TOTAL
		Yes	No	Unsure	
<i>How important do you think knowledge of hearing problems is to your career?</i>	Very Important	6	9	0	15
	Sometimes Important	0	0	0	0
	Not Important	0	0	0	0
	TOTAL	6	9	0	15

This gap is also shown when looking at the responses of the importance of hearing disorders and training of skills to use when working with a resident with tinnitus. When asked about the importance of hearing problems on their career, 100% of participants responded with the answer “Very Important”. When asked they were trained on what skills to use when working with a resident with tinnitus, only 40% of participants were trained, 60% were not trained, and none were unsure.

Table 24. Importance and Training of Presbycusis

		<i>Were you trained on what skills to use when working with a resident diagnosed with Presbycusis?</i>			TOTAL
		Yes	No	Unsure	
<i>How important do you think knowledge of hearing problems is to your career?</i>	Very Important	10	4	1	15
	Sometimes Important	0	0	0	0
	Not Important	0	0	0	0
	TOTAL	10	4	1	15

A gap is shown once again when looking at the responses of the importance of hearing disorders and training of skills to use when working with a resident with presbycusis. However, the prevalence of presbycusis is higher than tinnitus. Once again, when asked about the importance of hearing problems on their career, 100% of participants responded with the answer “Very Important”. When asked they were trained on what skills to use when working with a resident with tinnitus, only 67% of participants were trained, 27% were not trained, and 7% were unsure.

Table 25. Where did you learn that?

		<i>Disorder</i>			TOTAL
		Dysphagia	Tinnitus	Presbycusis	
<i>Where did you learn what you know about these disorders?</i>	On the job training	10	5	10	25
	Experience on the job	5	5	4	14
	Outside research	1	2	2	5
	Other (nursing class)	3	2	1	6
	Other (didn't learn)	1	2	1	4
TOTAL		20	16	18	54

Also when looking at the results for where they learned what they know about these disorders the majority for each disorder learned the job in training or nursing classes. However, a large percentage is going to work with these populations through learning on the job, outside research, or not at all. Once again, for this question participants were able to select more than one answer or write in their own response under the category other. The written responses for other were broken up into “nursing class” and “didn't learn” since these two responses vary in the answer to the question about where they had learned the disorder.

Chapter 4

Discussion

These results confirm gaps in the current knowledge of communication disorders for certified nursing assistants working in a nursing home. Most participants had a limited understanding of dysphagia, tinnitus, and presbycusis. They also reported that they had limited training on what skills to use when working with these disorders.

Results of earlier studies reported that certified nursing assistants' knowledge of feeding was limited and only 34% of participants correctly identified the signs and symptoms of dysphagia (Pelletier, 2004). Results from this current study established these results once again. Participants agreed that the understanding of this disorder is important to their career, yet 20% were unsure if they had an understanding of dysphagia. Dysphagia should be a key component of certified nursing assistant training, since it is a serious disorder that can result in death if it leads to aspiration pneumonia.

Previous research in the area of hearing disorders found a significant correlation between dissatisfaction with their medical care when a communication disability, in this case hearing loss, was diagnosed (Hoffman et al., 2005). Current results still show a gap between the importance of hearing disorders and understanding of the disorders, especially those with tinnitus. The majority of participants reported that they were not trained on what skills to use when working with a resident diagnosed with tinnitus. When asked they were trained on what skills to use when working with a resident with tinnitus, 27% were not trained and 7% were unsure. This lack of understanding and training for both hearing disorders may cause residents to become frustrated with the care they receive from certified nursing assistants.

An increase in the amount of communication disorders seen within nursing homes makes awareness of the speech and hearing disorders diagnosed in residents a crucial component in the training

of certified nursing assistants. Understanding of the disorder and skills to use when working with these populations should be trained before certified nursing assistants begin working with residents. This training can be completed during certified nursing classes or pre-work training given at the nursing home. Knowledge of these disorders will break the barrier between speech and hearing professionals and certified nursing assistants resulting in the best possible care to these residents.

As speech language pathologists, healthcare providers, healthcare administration, as well as friends and family to those living diagnosed with these disorders, it is our responsibility to advocate for training that will provide a healthier living environment and higher quality of life. People with communication disorders face many challenges, especially when they no longer play a part in determining and gauging needed health care. Due to the complex and chronic nature of dysphagia, tinnitus, and presbycusis, intervention efforts must include strategies to reduce overall disability. Intervention should include working with the person with the disorder, people in that person's environment, and broader social institutions to maximize accessibility to tools and training for people with communication disorders. Also, health care providers, such as certified nursing assistants, need to be knowledgeable in the appropriate strategies for communicating effectively with these populations to allow residents to express their needs and concerns (Yorkston, Bourgeois, & Baylor, 2010).

Since 100% of participants surveyed believed that communication, swallowing, and hearing disorders are important to their career as a certified nursing assistant, certain training programs should be considered by both the National Nurse Aide Assessment Program, but also administration at nursing homes across the country.

In 1999, Travers (1999) advocated for nurses to increase their understanding of dysphagia, since they are often the first to observe the signs and symptoms of dysphagia. She offered that an understanding of dysphagia and possible complications would prepare nurses to “assess high-risk clients, advocate for prompt diagnosis, use compensatory interventions, and educate clients and their family members” (Travers, 1999).

In regards to tinnitus, certified nursing assistants should be aware if their resident is diagnosed with or expresses symptoms of tinnitus. Also, they should be informed about the types of strategies available to help them cope with the symptoms and be aware of any medical management for the disorder (Edwards, 2009).

Presbycusis has many risk factors that certified nursing assistants should be aware of including heritability, environment factors, medical conditions, and damage of mitochondrial DNA. If undiagnosed, presbycusis can go on to put individuals in isolation along with a great deal of frustration. Also, if diagnosed certified nursing assistants should be aware of treatment options such as hearing aids and coping strategies (Huang & Tang, 2010).

We cannot improve the conditions and health of individuals diagnosed with communication disorders residing within nursing homes until changes have been made to the system that trains and assess the knowledge of certified nursing assistants. In summary, older people with communication disabilities show diverse signs and symptoms in regards to their diagnosis. Because these disorders may interfere with access to health and quality of life, identification and management is critical.

Appendix A

Recruitment Materials

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED FOR RESEARCH ON CERTIFIED NURSING ASSISTANTS' KNOWLEDGE OF COMMUNICATION DISORDERS

We are looking for volunteers to complete a survey on the knowledge and training of Certified Nursing Assistants on communication disorders. As a participant in this survey and interview, you would be asked to answer questions about: how important you believe these disorders are in your work, your understanding of these disorders, and where you learned what you know about them. The study will take approximately 30 minutes for you complete. In appreciation of your time, you will receive a gift card to a local restaurant.

If you are interested, please email me at sak5472@psu.edu.

Thank you!

Sara Kielbasa

**This study has been reviewed and approved by the
Institutional Review Board (IRB), Pennsylvania State University**

Appendix B

Survey Items

Communication Disorders & CNAs' Working in a Nursing Home

Section 1 - Demographic Information

INSTRUCTIONS – Please circle or fill in your response

1. Gender

Male
Female

2. Race/Ethnicity

African American
Hispanic
Asian American
Native America
Caucasian
Other _____

3. Current Caseload

Number of Residents _____

4. Degree Earned

GED
High School
Some College
Associate Degree
Bachelor Degree
Other _____

5. Current Age _____

6. Number of years working as a Certified Nursing Assistant _____

Section 2 - Your Impressions

INSTRUCTIONS – Please circle your response

1. How important do you think knowledge of communication problems is to your career?

1 – Not important 2 – Sometimes important 3 – Very important

2. How important do you think your knowledge of swallowing problems is to your career?

1 – Not important 2 – Sometimes important 3 – Very important

3. How important do you think your knowledge of hearing problems is to your career?

1 – Not important 2 – Sometimes important 3 – Very important

Section 3 – Your Understanding of Communication Disorders

INSTRUCTIONS – Please circle your response

1. Have you ever worked with residents diagnosed with Dysphagia (difficulty or discomfort in swallowing)?

Yes No Unsure

2. Were you trained on what skills to use when working with a resident with Dysphagia?

Yes No Unsure

3. Do you feel you have an understanding of Dysphagia?

Yes No Unsure

4. Have you ever worked with residents diagnosed with Tinnitus (ringing or buzzing in the ears)?

Yes No Unsure

5. Were you trained on what skills to use when working with a resident with Tinnitus?

Yes No Unsure

6. Do you feel you have an understanding of Tinnitus?

Yes No Unsure

7. Have you ever worked with residents diagnosed with Presbycusis (gradual hearing loss that commonly occurs as people age)?

Yes No Unsure

8. Were you trained on what skills to use when working with a resident with Presbycusis?

Yes No Unsure

9. Do you feel you have an understanding of Presbycusis?

Yes No Unsure

Section 4 – Where did you learn that?

INSTRUCTIONS – Please circle or fill in your response

1. Where did you learn what you know about Dysphagia?

- On the job training
- Experience on the job
- Outside research
- Other _____

2. Where did you learn what you know about Tinnitus?

- On the job training
- Experience on the job
- Outside research
- Other _____

3. Where did you learn what you know about Presbycusis?

- On the job training
- Experience on the job
- Outside research
- Other _____

THANK YOU – Your time and participation is greatly appreciated!

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Dean's List

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National Student Speech Language and Hearing Association (NSSLHA); 2015
THON – Penn State IFC/Panhellenic Dance Marathon Dancer

National Student Speech Language and Hearing Association (NSSLHA); 2014 – 2015
THON – Penn State IFC/Panhellenic Dance Marathon Fundraising Chairman

National Student Speech Language and Hearing Association (NSSLHA); 2013 – 2014
Corresponding Secretary – Penn State Chapter

College of Health and Human Development Honor Society; 2012 – 2015
Selected Member

JumpStart Retreat; 2012 – 2014
Retreat Leader

Penn State College of Health and Human Development Student Council; 2012 – 2013
Secretary

Professional Experience

St. Joseph's Center, Scranton, PA

Direct Support Professional, Summer 2014

National Human Services School, State College, PA,

Volunteer, 2013 – 2014

Professional Presentations

Penn State University Park Campus Undergraduate Exhibition, Poster Session, 2015

Health and Human Development Alumni Society Research Poster Competition, 2015