

Preserving Function within Progressive Conditions: The Role of the SLP

Speech language pathologists (SLPs) are the experts in communication, cognitive-linguistics, and dysphagia. Often, SLPs are providing care to patients with chronic and progressive conditions that negatively impact these areas of function.

Chronic and Progressive Conditions Impacting Function May Include:

- Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis
- Vascular Dementia
- Lewy Body Dementia
- Frontotemporal Dementia
- Huntington’s Disease
- Multiple Sclerosis
- Parkinson’s Disease
- Alzheimer’s Disease

Areas that may be affected:

- Difficulty chewing and/or swallowing
- Difficulty verbalizing the right sounds/words
- Impairments in vocal quality
- Forgetfulness and confusion
- Behavior issues
- Problems following conversations
- Trouble verbalizing wants and needs
- Difficulty following instructions

What is Maintenance Therapy?

Maintenance therapy is established and implemented by the SLP to prevent unnecessary, avoidable complications from a chronic condition, such as deterioration of communication skills and reduced functional independence in activities of daily living.

How Can SLP Help?

The SLP can provide a thorough assessment of the resident’s current abilities and identify areas that are affecting everyday functioning. By creating patient-centered goals and providing patient/caregiver education, the SLP can foster resident success during maintenance therapy and upon discharge. This includes:

- ✓ Adapting the environment to improve overall functioning (i.e., improved lighting, labeling/signage, etc.).
- ✓ Incorporating assistive technology/devices to maintain functional abilities (i.e., clocks, video chat, etc.).
- ✓ Integrating augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) (i.e., pictures, symbols, speech generating devices, etc.).
- ✓ Assisting with voice banking to preserve a resident’s speech due to a condition where the loss of speech may be inevitable.
- ✓ Training in the use of memory aids to help compensate for memory deficits and maximize independence (i.e., checklists, calendars, memory books, etc.).
- ✓ Establishing and educating patient/caregiver in safe swallowing techniques and/or diet modifications considering the patient’s personal wishes.
- ✓ Transitioning the responsibility of implementing the program to the patient and/or caregivers.

The network of care is paramount for patients with progressive illness, and SLPs are key players in that network. They work with patients, families, and caregivers to help them understand and manage these changes, minimize stress and frustration, and provide a supportive environment for the individual with progressive conditions.

Contact clinicalteam@reliant-rehab.com for more information.