Speech-Language Pathologist

DESCRIPTION OF THE FIELD
Speech-language pathologists (sometimes called speech therapists) assess, diagnose, treat, and help prevent communication and swallowing disorders in patients. Speech, language, and swallowing disorders result from a variety of causes, such as a stroke, brain injury, hearing loss, developmental delay, Parkinson’s disease, a cleft palate, or autism. Duties include evaluating patients’ levels of speech, language, or swallowing difficulty, identifying treatment options, and creating and carrying out an individualized treatment plan that addresses patients’ specific functional needs. They also teach patients how to make sounds and improve their voices, develop and strengthen the muscles used to swallow, and counsel patients and families on how to cope with communication and swallowing disorders.

Speech-language pathologists work with patients who have problems with speech and language, including related cognitive or social communication problems. Their patients may be unable to speak at all, or they may speak with difficulty or have rhythm and fluency problems, such as stuttering. Speech-language pathologists may work with people who are unable to understand language or with those who have voice disorders, such as inappropriate pitch or a harsh voice. Speech-language pathologists also must complete administrative tasks, including keeping accurate records. They record their initial patient evaluations and diagnoses, track treatment progress, and note any changes in a patient’s condition or treatment plan. Some speech-language pathologists specialize in working with specific age groups, such as children or the elderly. Others focus on treatment programs for specific communication or swallowing problems, such as those resulting from strokes or a cleft palate. Speech-language pathologists typically need at least a master’s degree. Although master’s programs do not require a particular undergraduate degree for admission, certain courses must be taken before entering a program. Required courses vary by institution. (Provided by the Occupational Outlook Handbook)

CAREERS
Speech-language pathologists can work in a variety of settings including:

- Education services (state, local, and private)
- Offices of physical, occupational and speech therapists, and audiologists
- Hospitals (state, local, and private)
- Nursing and residential care facilities
- Social assistance

RESOURCES
For more information, please visit the following websites:

Occupational Outlook Handbook
http://www.bls.gov/ooh/healthcare/mobile/speech-language-pathologists.htm

American Speech-Language-Hearing Association
http://www.asha.org/