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Educating audiologists in South Africa: internationally recognized specialists or locally relevent generalists? A pilot study investigating the perceived adequacy of undergraduate programmes in South Africa and the need for educational reform

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ABSTRACT

The demands made on the profession of audiology by substantial theoretical, clinical and technological developments are extensive, resulting in an increased and specialised scope of practice. Professional bodies and tertiary institutions in the United States have responded to these demands by suggesting that the Clinical Doctorate in Audiology (Au.D.) be made the minimal entry-level into the profession. In South Africa, the minimum entry-level into the profession is a 4-year professional undergraduate degree. No consensus regarding how to deal with the demands of an increasing scope of practice has been reached and as a result there is currently a lack of consistency in training programmes and registration with the Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA). While the HPCSA recognizes speech-language pathology and audiology as independent and autonomous professions, the two occupations are inextricably linked due to the historical evolution of training programmes in South Africa. This study investigated the perceptions of audiologists regarding the adequacy of undergraduate academic and clinical training in audiology and questioned the need for educational reform. A parallel study, which used the same research tool, documented an audit of audiological service delivery (Naidoo, 2006). A total of 284 responses (a response rate of 18.93%) were obtained from a self-administered postal questionnaire sent to professionals registered with the HPCSA. The sample was representative of all universities offering undergraduate training programmes and professionals working in all provinces. All workplaces were represented with an equal distribution between audiologists employed in the private and public sectors. Results of the study indicated that undergraduate training programmes were perceived as not providing adequate training in the fields of amplification, vestibular testing, practice management, supervision and the audiological management of persons infected with HIV/AIDS. The results of an audit of service delivery (Naidoo, 2006) confirmed that the majority of audiologists perform only basic testing and few provide advanced diagnostic services. The results of this study showed that audiologists felt most adequately prepared for basic audiology procedures and paediatric audiology, but only somewhat prepared for diagnostic testing and amplification. The majority of respondents indicated that they intend to maintain dual-registration with the HPCSA through Continuing Professional Development (CPD) and would prefer to study an undergraduate degree in speech-language pathology and audiology as opposed to a degree in speech-language pathology or audiology. Respondents were unable to identify core areas of audiology that were appropriate to be taught at undergraduate degree. The United States model of a Clinical Doctorate in Audiology (AuD) was rejected as the majority of respondents expressed the opinion that an undergraduate degree is appropriate as an entry-level into the profession of audiology.

The results of the research are felt to be an accurate depiction of the status quo of the profession of audiology in South Africa, and do not negate the need for educational reform. .