Clinical Supervisor Characteristics Valued by Practising Speech-language Therapists

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BACKGROUND

• Few studies have examined which characteristics of clinical supervisors are valued by practising clinicians.
• Supervisor characteristics valued by student supervisees include: Interpersonal competence; affirming personal values/attitudes; professional knowledge; clinical skills; teaching ability; administration skills; and an ability to make the supervisee feel safe.
• A study from the field of nursing suggested that practising clinicians perceive personal characteristics and interpersonal qualities to be important in a clinical supervisor.
• Furthermore, developmental models of competence and clinical supervision suggest clinicians with less experience have different clinical supervision needs.

RESEARCH AIMS

• To examine the knowledge, attitude, and skill characteristics of a clinical supervisor that are perceived to be of value by speech-language therapists practising in New Zealand.
• Determine if the attitudes of experienced clinicians (> 5 years clinical practice) and less experienced clinicians (< 5 years clinical practice) differ in regard to characteristics perceived to be of value in a clinical supervisor.

HYPOTHESES

• A clinical supervisor’s interpersonal knowledge, skills and personal values/attitude characteristics are valued by supervisees as much, or more than, clinical competence, professional knowledge, and identity.
• The views of less experienced clinicians will differ significantly to those of more experienced clinicians.

METHOD

• Participants: Seventy-two speech-language therapists currently practising in New Zealand (6% male, 94% female). See figure 1 for work sectors represented.
• Tasks: Completion of a self-administered survey instrument, either manually or by computer.
• Survey Instrument: Consisted of five sections: (1) demographic data; (2) current clinical supervision situation; (3) 50 statements regarding valued knowledge, attitude, and skill characteristics; (4) rank order exercise; and (5) open ended comment.
• Statements in section 3 began with the carrier phrase – “It is important to me that a clinical supervisor...” Participants were instructed that responses should not necessarily be in relation to their current clinical supervisor.
• A 100 millimetre visual analogue scale was used for response recording. Text stating strongly agree and strongly disagree were positioned underneath, equal distance from either end of the scale.
• Statistics: Mann-Whitney U tests with alpha at 0.001 (Bonferroni adjusted due to large number of comparisons) were completed to determine if significant differences existed between the experienced and less experienced clinician groups.

RESULTS

• Overall, interpersonal characteristics and positive personal values and attitudes were perceived as most important (see table 1).
• Results also showed that professional identity and knowledge characteristics were perceived as the least important.
• Statistically, there was little difference between the perceptions of experiences versus less experienced clinicians. Only one significant difference was observed - “suggests techniques I can use in my practice”.

DISCUSSION

• Practising clinicians valued similar characteristics in their clinical supervisor regardless of experience level, because they can all be seen as learners.
• Practising clinicians may require clinical supervision focussed on individual wellbeing and supporting experiences in the workplace as opposed to supervision related to professional practice issues.
• A clinical supervisor of practising clinicians may require training in the use of methods appropriate to an individual clinician’s needs.
• Future research should: (1) employ random sampling methods or use alternative research designs; (2) increase participant numbers; and (3) comprehensively analyse data across different work experience levels.

REFERENCES