

STARs:

I brought forward the opening for a MSHA habilitation representative to ASHA at the MSHA fall conference in Helena and invited members to take the position. I will be the habilitation representative until a member volunteers.

I am going to include a quote from the ASHA Leader on what role the position plays for our members:

Habilitation – What it is And Why it Matters to You

January 4, 2012 By [Amy Hasselkus](#)

Most of us are familiar with the term rehabilitation and are comfortable with our role in providing “rehab” services. Habilitation, on the other hand, may be less common. I don’t know of many SLPs who consider themselves “habilitation providers.” Audiologists may be somewhat more comfortable with the term as providers of aural habilitation, but not in other contexts.

So, what is habilitation? Basically, we are talking about services that help a person learn, keep, or improve skills and functional abilities that they may not be developing normally. Still not clear? Contrast that with services that help a person improve skills that have been lost after a stroke, head injury, illness, or other cause. The latter is rehabilitation – regaining lost skills or functioning. Habilitation refers to services for those who may not have ever developed the skill, such as a child who is not talking as expected for his or her age. Adults can also benefit from habilitative services, particularly those with intellectual disabilities or disorders such as cerebral palsy who may benefit from services at different points in their life to address functional abilities.

Why the focus on distinguishing habilitation from rehabilitation? Anyone who has dealt with private insurance for a person needing habilitative services likely knows the answer. If you look closely at coverage descriptions for many insurance plans, you’ll likely see language specifying that services like physical therapy or speech-language pathology will be provided when skills have been lost due to illness or injury. This language

automatically restricts payment for services to those who haven't had a stroke or suffered an illness, including most children who don't have a specific diagnosis underlying their speech, language, swallowing, or hearing problems.

As we face more stringent documentation demands for reimbursement, the role of habilitation is a major factor to not only be aware of , but also be trained in to capture reimbursement, and continue the ongoing education of the business of speech/language pathology and audiology.

I plan to attend the ASHA connect in New Orleans and attend the STARs meeting.

Please feel free to contact me with questions.

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