

Introduction to the Department of Speech Therapy at Niigata University of Health and Welfare

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Overview

Department of history of speech therapy was founded in April, 2001, at the Niigata University of Health and Welfare as a training and education course for speech therapists following the establishment of "Regulation for speech therapists" in December, 1997. Universities and colleges with a four year speech therapist training course in Japan are as followed in chronological order of establishment: International University of Health and Welfare (80 students /year), Hiroshima Prefecture College of Health Sciences (30 students/year), Kawasaki University of Medical Welfare (30 students / year), Kitazato University (20 students/year), and Kyushu University of Health and Welfare (40 students/year). Niigata University of Health and Welfare is the 6th school following the above. During the next year (2002), Health Sciences University of Hokkaido (50 students/year) and Teikyo Heisei University (80 students/year) will join the above. Furthermore, there are schools with various training periods like 3 year and 4-year high school level and 2-year junior college level. Despite such variation in training period, all of the graduates from such universities and high schools can be equally qualified to take the national examination. The number of these training organizations is more than 30 in total and the number of their graduates expected to

reach one thousand each year.

Our department has accepted 50 students this spring and is expecting them to obtain the national merit after 4 years. 4 professors, 3 associate professors, 2 instructors and 1 assistant, operate this department totaling 10 teaching staff.

1. Progress of clinical speech therapy and establishment of the national qualification

Clinical study and therapy spread domestically in Japan after the introduction of American speech pathology and therapy forty years ago and a remarkable development has been achieved especially in both education and therapeutic areas. In education, since the official establishment of a special class for the speech disadvantages in Sendai, the importance and need for such an area was recognized and a number of such classes reached to 2,639 over many districts in Japan and the total number of the students in classes were 16,592 in 1996 (Data for special education, Monbusho). However, all of the students who suffered from difficulties of speech, therefore, had no choice except to be day students due to their special substance on education. For example, they were taught most of the days in ordinary class where they do not belong. Depending on the degree of disability, the students go a special class for 2 to 3 hours a week to receive teaching and therapy. This was

no doubt an abnormal state but this continued for a long time. In 1994, Monbusho had changed a part of the school education act to legalize an all day in-class system and the long-standing abnormal class education was eliminated. It must be noted that by this improvement of law, the quick educational response to lightly disabled children became possible to have proper education. Furthermore, the practice of such education has led to the fact that speech therapists can get involved in the education even without teacher's credential.

On the other hand, clinic for adult aphasia in medical health care originated first at Hot Spring Clinic Center in Nagano prefecture in 1964. In 1972, Laboratory for Linguistic and Hearing Studies was opened in Tokyo Metropolitan Institute for Aging, and the various studies concerning the ability of speech and communication, with emphasis for aphasia were carried out making a huge contribution to the area. However, there were many problems like shortage of therapists for the patients, the fragile position of therapists, the fact that under the regulation, no one can even request the increase of the number of therapists and insurance covering which are outdated and extremely poor rules. Thus, the establishing the qualifying methods and production of therapists with recognized position became urgent. In 1980, the joint committee to improve the status of ST (Speech Therapist) was started by Japanese Society of Otorhinolaryngology, Japanese Society for Vocal Linguistics, Japanese Society for Hearing and Speech, and others. This committee spent a long time for the discussion and decision-making, and finally succeeded to establish [Act for Speech Therapists] at 141st National Representative's Meeting in December 1997. By this law, the title of Speech Therapist became official and their duty and their right for the national board examination (training system) were determined.

In March 1999, the year that Act for Speech Therapist became law; the national board examination was carried out producing the first class of speech therapists of 4003 out of over 4500 applicants. The percentage of the passage was 87.9%. The second examination in the year 2000 produced 664 therapists out of 1565 applicant with a passing of 42.4%. The third examination this year, 2001, produced 936 therapists out of 1908 applicants with percentage of 49.1%.

2. Contents of education and characteristics of this department

Speech is an important method of communication in man and thus disability in communication can be considered as most destructive in life which forces the alteration of living. The disability of speech comes from various reasons and diseases and it should be considered with multiform. The responsibility of speech therapist is to understand the agony of disability, to reduce their difficulty as much as possible, and to give all of proper support to increase their quality of living. The therapists must be able to evaluate and diagnose the difficulties in speech and hearing, and to make suitable plans and to practice them properly. Under our departmental curriculum, students must take anatomy, physiology, and pathology as basic sciences during the first and second year, and introduction to speech difficulties, methods for various evaluation, diagnosis and treatment during second and third year and clinical practice during third and last year. All courses are systematically arranged to give the solid knowledge and technology. We set our emphasis on humanity and ethical standard, self-esteem and cooperativeness as a responsive wing in action of health team and language ability enough to work in international society.

3. Conclusion

It is no doubt important to train and produce specialists in the field of health and welfare responding to our ever experiencing ultra-aging society and thus to fulfill various need from the medicine and welfare, however, the real importance is to raise high quality specialists who can work along fast growing technology and specialization in health sciences, but not just increasing the number of therapists. Our department of speech therapy was established accompanied with various unfavorable circumstances like rapid increase of training schools, less than 50% pass ratio on the national board examination and unstable job market after graduation. Nevertheless, we are only one 4 year university with the training course located in Japan- sea-side, and thus have an important obligation to raise the highly able and excellent persons who can make a variety of contribution to our aging society. Thus, no matter how difficult the departmental condition is, all of us determined to make our best effort to carry our responsibility.