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To: Lisa Gibson <lgibson@caslpo.com>
Subject: Coronavirus Update: Further Practice Advice March 20, 2020



College of Audiologists and
Speech-Language Pathologists of Ontario
Ordre des audiologistes et
des orthophonistes de l'Ontario

March 20, 2020

To: [All CASLPO Registrants](#)

Late on March 19, 2020, the College received a copy of a Directive issued by the Acting Chief Medical Officer of Health that applies to all healthcare professionals including all audiologists and speech language pathologists, which was forwarded to all CASLPO registrants earlier today. This Directive also applies to employers who operate a clinic or facility regardless of whether they are regulated health care professionals themselves.

The Directive requires audiologists and speech language pathologists to immediately cease, or reduce to minimal levels, the provision of non-essential and elective services. This Directive has been issued under section 77.7 of the Health Protection and Promotion Act. There is an exception for time sensitive circumstances to avert or avoid negative patient outcomes or to avert or avoid a situation that would have a direct impact on the safety of patients. [LINK](#)

CASLPO has provided descriptions below to assist you in determining what is and is not "non-essential and elective services".

In addition, the Ministry of Health also issued a Memo: Supporting Expansion of Virtual Home Care Delivery, which may address some registrants' questions regarding virtual homecare and billing. [LINK](#)

Further, CASLPO has received inquiries following our last [eblast update \(March 17, 2020\)](#). The following also addresses these questions.

1. Description of non-essential or elective services

The Ministry refers to "non-essential or elective services", which is synonymous with what CASLPO previously referred to as "non-emergent care". Consequently, at this time, CASLPO's description for "non-essential and elective services" is as follows:

Any care that can be delayed without creating a serious risk of significant decline in the patient's health or function in the immediate future.

For example, situations involving,

- *Providing a routine hearing assessment*
- *Hearing aid fittings and repairs*
- *Outpatient speech or language intervention*

The Ministry identifies exemptions as, "time sensitive circumstances to avert or avoid negative patient outcomes or to avert or avoid a situation that would have a direct impact on the safety of patients". Consequently, at this time CASLPO's description of time sensitive "essential services" is as follows:

Any care that is required to immediately prevent a patient's health or function from significantly declining if treatment is not provided.

For example, situations involving,

- *Providing a hearing assessment to a patient who must undergo immediate ENT surgery.*
- *Providing pediatric swallowing assessment in the neonatal ICU when the patient is at risk of dehydration and malnutrition.*

Of course, there may be scenarios that are not clear cut. We recommend you use your professional judgement to consider the risks and benefits in each scenario for the benefit of your patient and the community at large. We also encourage you to discuss with our practice team any of these dilemmas (see link below).

2. CASLPO's expectations regarding telepractice

We understand in this current pandemic environment you are considering the use of telepractice and we encourage you to consider this alternate mode of intervention. Some registrants have asked that we provide a list of suitable platforms or wish us to assess proposed platforms. We applaud your desire to ensure security measures are in place. As with many other e-platforms (like record management), CASLPO does not require registrants to use specific platforms. Registrants are to determine whether the e-platform

offers the technical capability to provide safe, secure and timely care and accommodates the patient's abilities.

We encourage you to seek out colleagues who have used telepractice products, or any IT personnel you have access to. We have provided guidance through our Position Statement, [Use of Telepractice Approaches with Patients and Clients](#), which provides relevant information.

However, we advise that when all optimal conditions cannot be met, in particularly with regard to the current pandemic, that you **document** your rationale for deviating from any standards, as well your **consent discussion** with the patient that outlines what aspects of your intervention may not follow the standard(s).

3. Providing services not typically within your practice

Both audiologists and speech-language pathologists are beginning to be asked to assist with COVID-19 specific care, for example assisting with testing by performing nasopharyngeal swabs. We encourage you to ensure you have the competencies, or that you can reasonably obtain the competencies through training for any task that may be assigned.

In closing, we understand that you may be experiencing pressure from patients, employers, etc. CASLPO appreciates the challenge each one of you is facing in order to balance many competing interests, including the health of the patient, your health and the broader community. We encourage you to contact us (and colleagues) to discuss these serious and challenging dilemmas.

We will be providing employers for whom we have contact information with our COVID-19 Updates and it will be posted on our "Employer" Section of our website [LINK](#). We ask that you share this with your employer as well.

Thank you so much for all your questions and thoughtful consideration regarding your important role in managing this health crisis. We will do what is within our authority to support you so please do not hesitate to contact us at: [Practice Advice Team](#)

Brian O'Riordan
Registrar

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