

Ivy Rehab Network is an agency that provides a variety of services including occupational therapy (OT), physical therapy, and speech therapy. I chose to do my internship at this agency because my passion and goal is to become a speech therapist and to ultimately serve and help children. I have learned through my courses at Longwood University and through my real life experience gained at my internship that the theories, research, and concepts pertaining to sociology are ever present within the real world and must be examined and used when assisting clients and patients.

As an intern for speech therapy, I had a variety of daily tasks and responsibilities. Each day I would shadow my supervisor who is a Speech Language Pathologist (SLP) as she administered services to her patients. The patients we helped were from the ages of around three years old to fourteen years old. During a speech therapy session, my role was to observe and assist my supervisor in a variety of ways. This would include setting up the therapy room as well as cleaning it and disinfecting all of the items in the therapy room after a session, I would assist in communicating with the parents of our patients, and I was also tasked with recording progress notes that listed what therapeutic interventions we implemented during the session and the clients ability and level of participation during the session. Although I am not yet certified to perform any therapeutic interventions, a vast majority of the therapy sessions would include play therapy in which I would simply play with the client. In doing this, the client is provided with a much more natural and fun environment that gives them the opportunity to communicate in a relaxed setting. As I would play with the client, they would respond and talk to me and my supervisor would interject herself and correct any speech errors that the child may have had.

The most valuable skill I learned was how to interact and effectively assist children who not only struggle with speech, but they are also struggling with neurodivergence. A majority of our patients are diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) which can make it much more difficult for patients to communicate not just on an anatomical level, but also due to difficulties in social skills and healthy communication methods. I learned that this population can become very easily overwhelmed and overstimulated. In working with this population I learned that the best method to genuinely help them is simply by meeting them where they are at. What I mean by this, is that even though the client may not be at the “normal” developmental level for their age, it is important to remind myself that they have a multitude of barriers that may be further impacting their speech issues and in order to effectively help them, these additional barriers must also be addressed.

For example, I had a patient who had not been officially and formally diagnosed with ASD because his parents did not want their child to carry around that “title” for the rest of his life. Without a formal diagnosis, the client was unable to receive other services that could have helped him such as an IEP for his difficulties in school. While I had to learn how to advocate for this client to his parents, I also had to teach myself to be empathetic towards the parents. Through this situation, I gained the confidence to advocate for my clients while also being able to maintain relationships and address conflict. I was able to communicate with the parents on the importance of a formal diagnosis while also ensuring them that it is their right and their decision to make, even though I may personally not agree.

Not only did my internship help me grow my abilities to administer services to clients, but another aspect I took away are the injustices many populations face within our society. I remember learning in many of my sociology classes how our society was created and continues

to function on structurally racist systems. I directly saw this through my internship. Ivy Rehab Network accepts numerous different types of medicaid insurances. The majority of the clients and patients that this agency serves are families and children of color. Statistically, people of color are more likely to utilize federally funded programs due to the high percentage of this population being in a lower socioeconomic class. It is because of systemically racist structures within our society such as the education system, the housing system, the healthcare system, etc. that inhibits people of color from being able to gain financial freedom and to receive financially “better” services. Furthermore, it is because of these systems that oftentimes our client's speech issues are exacerbated. For example, many of our client’s who struggled with speech and who were also over the age of eight had never previously received speech services due to their parents difficulties in obtaining and finding services that would accept medicaid. Because of this, it makes it much more difficult to assist the client with their speech difficulties as they did not receive any interventions before their speech issues became worse and more permanent.

My internship at Ivy Rehab Network provided me with the tools, knowledge, and experience required for the real-life workforce. I am now more eager and more passionate as well as more competent to provide services, more specifically speech therapy, to underserved and unique populations. I am also now more aware than ever before how the institutions within our society exacerbate the issues and experiences that many clients face. I hope in my future career that I am able to provide an environment that not only assists and serves vulnerable populations such as children, families of color, and those within a low socioeconomic class, but also a place for advocacy and large-scale change.