

Speech Language Pathology is such a broad field, with such a wide variety in which area one can specialize. Throughout school, I was determined to work in a school setting with kids. What could be better than short work days and summers off?

Upon completion of my medical externship, I found that I really enjoyed working with Dysphagia and working with adults. The more that I worked with patients, the more I discovered that was what I wanted to do with my career. While I did work in the school system, I kept current with my adult dysphagia practice by working summers in various skilled nursing facilities.

My advice to those people new to the field of Speech Language Pathology is to learn as much as you can. Although six years seems like such a long time, there is no way to comprehensively cover all areas we treat. The area of dysphagia for example, was traditionally an elective class. When I graduated in 2001, our dysphagia course was an elective seminar.

Continuing education is available in abundance for the field of Speech Language Pathology. Continuing education courses are available through online sources such as [SpeechPathology.com](http://SpeechPathology.com), live courses and through Webinars.

Many of these courses are only available in certain areas and can be quite costly. I advise everyone to be extremely picky with the continuing education they choose. While it may be easy to go to a course because it's close to home or cheap, it may not be a course that will expand your knowledge or assist you in your everyday work life. I always try to attend courses by speakers that are knowledgeable on the topic and that can offer a concrete evidence-base, particularly when they are trying to sell a new therapeutic technique. I was able to read an article regarding the Modified Barium Swallow Impairment Profile (MBSImP) which prompted me to drive 4 hours to attend the conference. The MBSImP was well worth the money and drive as I learned a great deal.

Maximize your experience by attending your state convention or the national ASHA convention. Not only do they offer a variety of topics and presenters, there is also an exhibit hall that is a must. Although the free pens, notepads and bags are enticing, there is a lot to be learned by speaking with exhibitors. There are many people working in the exhibit hall that can teach you how to use therapy tools and direct you to books that are extremely useful. With mobile devices so popular, many apps companies are available in the exhibit

halls and will often help with use of the apps and show you ways to use apps in therapy that you may not have known existed.

Look for speakers that excel on the topic you choose. Some speakers may not be well known in the area you are learning (aphasia, dysphagia), just because the person does not complete research, does not mean they do not understand the topic or know the topic on which they are speaking. Unfortunately, there are people out there that don't understand the topic or give inaccurate information. Read the reviews of courses, look at the research and ask other SLPs. There are many ways to ask others what courses/speakers they would recommend.

Another positive experience with learning I have found is through Social Media. I have been the only SLP in my hospital for three years now. I developed my own paper clinical dysphagia evaluation by including evidence-based practice for lab values, medicines affecting swallowing, cranial nerve assessment and just a combination of all of the dysphagia evaluations I have used. I wanted more than just the paper copy. Through Twitter, I met Barbara Fernandes, owner of Smarty Ears. In a collaboration with her and a fellow SLP on Twitter, Dysphagia2Go was created, an app for the iPad, combining much of my paper evaluation. Through Twitter and Facebook, I have made many wonderful connections and created friendships with SLPs around the world.

It was also through Barbara, that I was introduced to PESI. PESI is a continuing education company, who is just breaking out with more SLP continuing education courses. Through that connection, I was invited to start speaking about dysphagia. Starting in December, I will be able to travel across the country speaking on the topic of dysphagia.

Twitter and Facebook have not only expanded my network of SLP friends, but has also given me another exciting part to the annual ASHA convention. It is so exciting to meet your "Twitter" friends in person. Through Twitter, I have been given various discounts on continuing education courses and have won free apps for my iPad. Through Facebook, I was selected as a member of the Smarty Ears Advisory Board. We are all apart of the Smarty Ears Advisory Board Facebook group, a closed group where we discuss new and old Smarty Ears apps, are able to trial the apps for testing and where we help to develop new ideas for apps.

Learning opportunities are available everywhere. Just because you graduate (again) doesn't mean that the learning stops. You'll find learning experiences in your job setting with every patient you see and throughout the community. Google, Wikipedia and ASHA websites will become your resources to learning new topics. SLPs should strive to find and use new and exciting therapy techniques so that they provide the best possible therapeutic environment for their patients.

Happy learning to all!

Tiffani Wallace has been a Speech Language Pathologist for over 10 years. Tiffani has worked with all populations. She currently works with adults and specializes in dysphagia. Tiffani works in an acute care hospital in Indiana. Tiffani is married and has 2 children. She serves on the Smarty Ears Advisory Board. Tiffani is the co-author of Dysphagia2Go (available on iTunes). She will soon be speaking on the topic of dysphagia for PESI. Tiffani is working towards Board Recognized Specialty in Swallowing and is the administrator of the Dysphagia Therapy Group and Dysphagia Therapy Group-Professional Edition on Facebook. You can find Tiffani's website at [www.dysphagiaramblings.com](http://www.dysphagiaramblings.com) or read her blog at [apujo5.blogspot.com](http://apujo5.blogspot.com).