Speech–Language Pathology Assistants

A Resource Manual

Second Edition

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Contents

Preface

Speech-language pathology assistants (SLPAs) are "support personnel who, following academic and/or on-the-job training, perform tasks prescribed, directed, and supervised by American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA)-certified speech-language pathologists (SLPs) (ASHA, n.d.-a., para. 2). The use of SLPAs and support personnel is not new. As early as the 1970s, support personnel in the field of speech-language pathology were being used and regulated by different states in the United States (ASHA, n.d.-a.). ASHA has had guidelines for the use of support personnel since 1969. According to ASHA, attention to the use of SLPAs has increased as professionals in the field look for ways to contain costs and expand clinical services (ASHA, n.d.-a.). ASHA maintains and periodically updates formal policy and guidelines on the training, use, and supervision of SLPAs. Recognizing national inconsistency in SLPA use and training, ASHA also created an optional associates program in 2011 (Robinson, 2010). The program extends ASHA affiliation to qualified support personnel who agree to follow all ASHA policies and guidelines pertaining to the use and supervision of support personnel (McNeilly, 2010). In 2017, ASHA's Board of Directors also voted in favor of approving funding and implementation of new Assistants Certification Programs for audiology assistants and SLPAs (ASHA, n.d.-b.). This new program is scheduled to launch sometime in 2020.

CONTENT

This book is written specifically for SLPAs, addressing their unique needs. It is intended to be a practical resource on a wide range of topics that SLPAs may find of value. It does not cover normal processes of communication or communicative disorders in-depth. Rather, it is intended as a "what now" or real-world perspective offering technical and clinical procedure suggestions for SLPAs, including SLPA professional issues and ethics, and instruction in workplace behaviors, such as implementing treatment and collecting and summarizing data. Specialized topics applicable to SLPAs, such as augmentative and alternative communication, cultural and linguistic diversity, play and literacy in therapy, speech sound remediation, and autism spectrum disorder are also included to extend SLPAs' foundational knowledge to real-world applications. This book is written for individuals with a variety of SLPA experience and training. It is my hope that SLPAs with all levels of experience and background will find tools and resources of value to them in this book. If you are an SLPA who has been in the field for many years, this book may offer you a fresh perspective on your role and ideas for continuing to refine your skills. If you are an SLPA just starting your career, this book offers you important information to take with you on your jour-

ney. If you are an SLPA in training, the book provides you with information relevant for your training, particularly to your clinical practicum and future employment as an SLPA.

ORGANIZATION

The first six chapters cover broad topics, including an overview of the roles and responsibilities of SLPAs and their supervisors. The initial chapters also cover professional conduct, ethics, cultural and linguistic diversity, and topics important to the health and safety of SLPAs and the individuals they serve. Within these sections, ASHA documents are a cornerstone when referencing policies, procedures, rules, and regulations applicable to SLPA practice. At present, there is considerable variability between states' regulations applicable to SLPAs. As such, ASHA, as the sole national organization for the profession in the United States, serves as an important and primary resource on the topic. That is not to say that SLPAs should ignore state regulations. Rather, as will be discussed, SLPAs must be cognizant of both ASHA and individual state regulations. References and suggestions for accessing state-specific information are provided. Furthermore, given the dynamic nature of policies and procedures, readers should view the information in this book as an overview of regulations and policies in place at the time of publication. The reader is referred to ASHA's website, at https://www.asha.org, for the most recent information.

The next six chapters of the book are organized as "skill development"

chapters. These chapters cover a specific set of skills needed by SLPAs across a wide variety of settings. They include the important topics of data collection, note writing, therapy implementation techniques for individual and group sessions, and a newly added chapter on the use of behavioral principles. Throughout each skill development chapter, helpful tips and applicable references and resources are provided, with the major emphasis on providing information that will be of value in actual clinical work as an SLPA.

The remaining seven chapters include treatment foundations and suggestions for specific populations, including newly added chapters on early intervention, language interventions for children, and foundational knowledge for working with adults with acquired neurologic disorders. This is not an exhaustive list of all the populations and disorders SLPAs may encounter in their clinical work. Rather, these chapters serve as additional considerations for common populations and disorders SLPAs might encounter.

COMPANION WEBSITE

This book has a companion website with important forms SLPAs can use in their clinical work. These forms can be freely modified and copied. Explanations about the content on the companion website are embedded within the chapters of the book. The following symbol denotes where the content of the companion website is referenced.

REFERENCES

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Acknowledgments

Contributors

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Sarah Guzzino-Herrick is a speech-language pathologist in Southern California working in an elementary school and private practice. She co-authored the first edition of Chapter 11, titled Group Ther-

apy, while in graduate school and working as a licensed speech-language pathology assistant at an elementary school. She received her BA and MA in Communicative Disorders from California State University, Long Beach.

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Jodi Robledo is an associate professor in Special Education at California State University, San Marcos and serves as the program coordinator of the Education Specialist Credential Programs and Master's Degree option. In addition, she is the program director for the Applied Behavior Analysis Certificate of Advanced Study and the Autism Spectrum Disorder Added Authorization. She also teaches courses in the Speech and Language Pathology Department. Prior to this appointment, she was a K–12 autism specialist and education specialist in an urban multicultural school district. Dr. Robledo currently teaches courses with a focus on autism spectrum disorder, supporting individu-

als with moderate to severe disabilities, and inclusive education. She has journal publications, several book chapters, and numerous national conference presentations on these and other topics. Recently, one of her studies received Tier 2 distinction in *Frontiers in Integrative Neuroscience*. Her research interests focus on autism spectrum disorder, supportive relationships, sensory and movement differences, and inclusive education.

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ILLUSTRATIONS

Ben Philpott
Chapter illustrations were provided by Ben Philpott. Ben Philpott lives in Tucson, Arizona, and earned his BA in communicative disorders from California State University, Long Beach. He has worked as an SLPA in school, clinic and home settings. He currently works for Scientific Learning, where he trains teachers on how to implement reading intervention software.

PART I

Defining Roles: Speech–Language Pathology Assistants (SLPAs)

CHAPTER 1

Defining Roles: SLPAs

Confidence, like art, never comes from having all the answers;
it comes from being open to all the questions.

—Earl Gray Stevens

The American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA) defines SLPAs as "support personnel who perform tasks as prescribed, directed, and supervised by an ASHA-certified speech-language pathologist (SLP)" (ASHA, 2013, Executive Summary, para. 1). SLPAs are not independent practitioners, but rather work specifically under the direction and guidance of a qualified SLP to increase the availability, frequency, and efficiency of services provided by the SLP. SLPAs provide services in a wide variety of settings. These settings include, but are not limited to the following (ASHA, 2013, Executive Summary, para. 1)[1]:

- Public, private, and charter elementary and secondary schools,
- Early intervention settings, preschools, and day care settings,
- Hospitals (in- and outpatient),

- Residential health care settings (e.g., long-term care and skilled nursing facilities),
- Nonresidential health care settings (e.g., home health agencies, adult day care settings, clinics),
- Private practice settings,
- University and college clinics,
- Research facilities,
- Corporate and industrial settings, and
- Student's patient's and client's residence.

SLPAs differ from other support personnel, such as speech and language aides, instructional aides, and communication aides both in the level of training and in the amount of supervision and oversight they receive. According to ASHA (n.d.-a.), "aides, for example, have a different, usually narrower, training base and more limited responsibilities than speech-language pathology assistants" (Defining Speech-Language Pathology Assistants, para 2).

The use of SLPAs is not new in the field of speech-language pathology. ASHA has had documents addressing support personnel since as early as the 1960s. The role of the SLPA in the field of speech-language pathology continues to evolve, however, given changes in health and educational service delivery models, increases in the number of individuals with communication disorders, expansion in the scope of services provided by SLPs, and the rising costs of providing these services.

ASHA (2013) outlines that "some tasks, procedures, or activities used to treat individuals with communication and related disorders can be performed successfully by individuals other than an SLP, if the persons conducting the activity are properly trained and supervised by

ASHA-certified or licensed SLPs" (Executive Summary, para. 1). This chapter outlines recommendations for the training and use of SLPAs. Recommendations for the supervision of SLPAs are summarized in Chapter 2.

ASHA is the national professional organization in the United States in the field of speech-language pathology. For the purpose of this book, recommendations and standards reviewed are applicable to SLPAs in the United States, using ASHA recommendations and practice guidelines. At the writing of this book, ASHA's primary policy document on the training, use, and supervision of SLPAs was *Speech-Language Pathology Assistant Scope of Practice* (ASHA, 2013), which is available as Appendix 1–A and can also be retrieved from http://www.asha.org/

Internationally, there is variability in professional classification, services provided, and the use of assistants in the field of speech-language pathology. For individuals interested in obtaining information about SLPAs outside of the United States, Appendix 1–B contains a summary of international SLP professional organizations (this information is also available at http://www.asha.org/). These organizations are a good starting point for discovering if SLPAs exist at similar levels in other parts of the world. The International Association of Logopedics and Phoniatrics is also a source of information on this topic (http://www.ialp.info/).

In the United States, regulations for the training, use, and supervision of support personnel vary from state to state. The governing bodies that regulate or oversee the use of SLPAs also vary from state to state. In some locations, a state's department of education (or similar educational body) establishes and oversees

specific requirements for SLPA training, use, and supervision in school settings. In some locations, state licensing boards regulate SLPA training, use, and supervision in nonschool settings. And in some cases, educational setting-specific requirements overlap with those of noneducation requirements, but in others they differ.

Figure 1–1 depicts a map highlighting states with official designation or regulation of SLPAs (ASHA, n.d.-b.). States not highlighted in gray either: (a) do not have an official regulating mechanism specifically for SLPAs (although they may recognize that SLPs use assistants, aides, or other types of paraprofessionals), or (b) use paraprofessional designations other than SLPA, such as communication aides, communication technicians, SLP apprentices, or SLP paraprofessionals.

As an SLPA, if you are working in a setting that requires formal licensure, certification, or registration for support personnel, it is imperative that you adhere to any applicable laws, regulations, and procedures. Not doing so could compromise the care of the individuals you serve and place you and your supervisor in legal jeopardy for actions outside your state's standards. SLPAs should familiarize themselves with the most recent regulations in their locations. Realize as well that state standards may change annually or without notice. Hence, it is your responsibility as an SLPA to be familiar with, and stay abreast of, the most recent regulations in your location.

ASHA's State Advocacy Team maintains a page on ASHA's website that summarizes each state's requirements, including requirements for support personnel (http://www.asha.org/advocacy/state/). This is an invaluable resource for SLPAs. SLPAs should also go directly to the web-

site of their state's regulating body for information regarding SLPA regulations, laws, and procedures. An Internet search using terms such as the name of your state plus *speech-language pathology assistant*, *support personnel*, *registration*, *certification*, or *licensure*, will likely yield the contact information you need.

Lastly, before we begin a detailed discussion about SLPA training and use, it is helpful to understand what documents and guidelines ASHA has available on this and related topics. Appendix 1–C contains a description of cardinal sources from ASHA relative to SLPAs. ASHA also maintains a "Frequently Asked Questions" section on its website with current and helpful information about SLPAs. ASHA also has "practice portals" for professionals to access ASHA resources and policies on specific topics. The practice portal on the subject of SLPAs is highly valuable for current information on topics related to support personnel. It can be accessed via http://www.asha.org/Practice-Portal/Professional-Issues/Speech-Language-Pathology-Assistants/ or by searching *practice portal* and *SLPA* on ASHA's website.

The information discussed in this book applies to documents published by ASHA at the time this book was written. As an SLPA, you should make ASHA's website a favorite on your home page for ready access. Similar to state regulations, ASHA policies and documents change over time. As such, it is critical that you keep abreast of recent information from ASHA applicable to SLPAs. Following a description of SLPA use and training, the final section of this chapter describes ASHA affiliation for SLPAs, which is an additional avenue for keeping connected with ASHA's professional community.

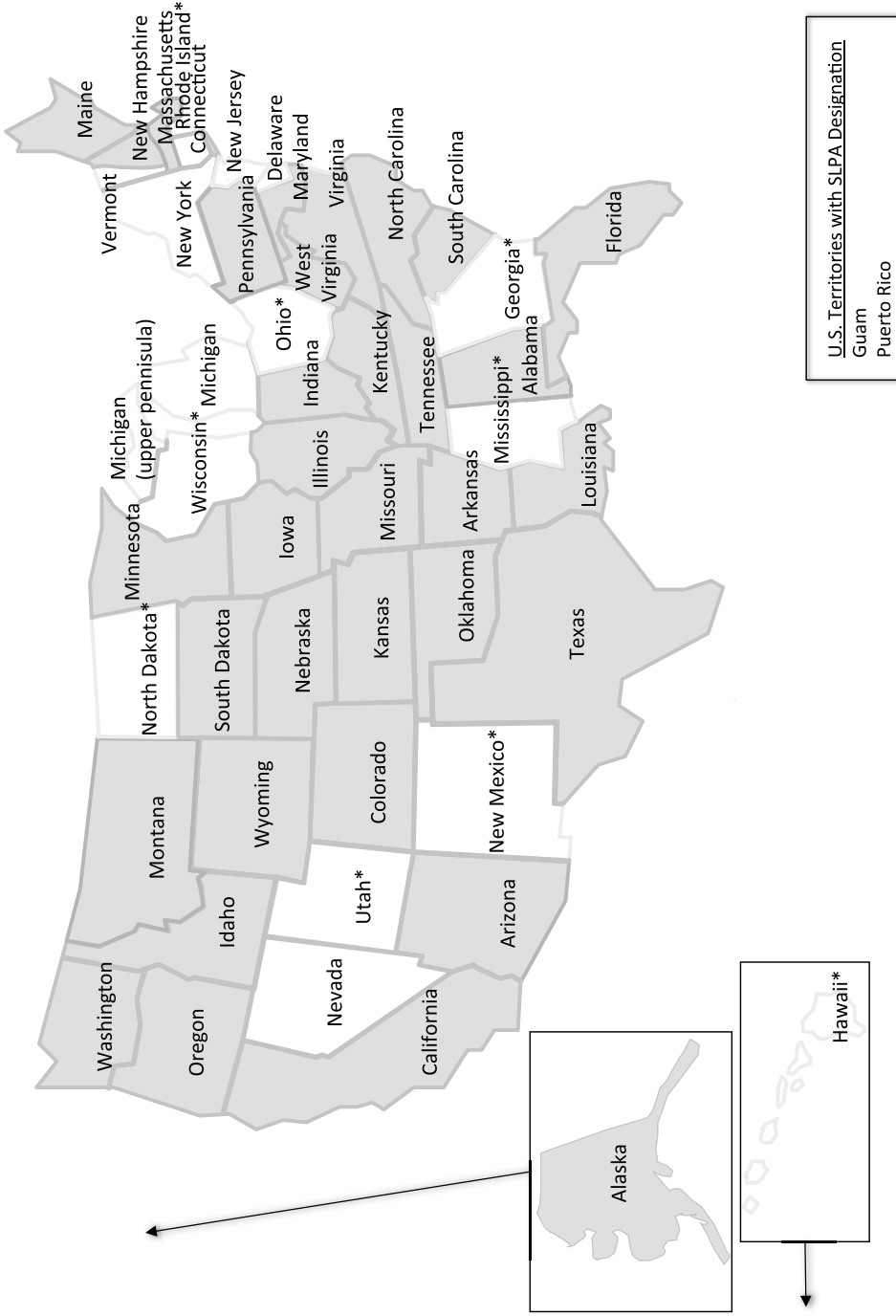**Figure 1–1.** States with formal SLPA designations (ASHA, n.d.–b). *Note.* States highlighted in gray formally recognize SLPAs, through registration, certification, licensure, or some other formal mechanism. Asterisks denote states with formal designations in the field of speech–language pathology other than SLPA, such as communication aide, technician, and speech–language pathology paraprofessional.

SLPA MINIMUM QUALIFICATIONS

As noted earlier, required training and education will vary by state, but ASHA recommends the following minimum qualifications for SLPAs (2013, Minimal Qualifications of an SLPA, para. 1)[1]:

■ An associate's degree from an SLPA program, or a bachelor's degree in a speech-language pathology or communication disorders program;

■ Successful completion of a minimum of one hundred (100) hours of supervised field work experience or equivalent clinical experience; and

■ Demonstration of competency in the skills required of an SLPA.

SLPA DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

ASHA expectations for SLPAs working in the field of speech-language pathology include performing only those tasks that are prescribed by an SLP and adhering to all applicable guidelines and regulations, including state licensure and related rules regarding SLPAs in specific settings. Specifically, ASHA states that SLPAs are expected to do the following (ASHA, 2013, Expectations of an SLPA, para. 1)[1]:

■ Seek employment only in settings in which direct and indirect supervision are provided on a regular and systematic basis by an ASHA-certified or licensed SLP.

■ Adhere to the responsibilities for SLPAs and refrain from performing tasks or activities that are the sole responsibility of the SLP.

■ Perform only those tasks prescribed by the supervising SLP.

■ Adhere to all applicable state licensure laws and rules regulating the practice of speech-language pathology, such as those requiring licensure or registration of support personnel.

■ Conduct oneself ethically within the scope of practice and responsibilities for an SLPA.

■ Actively participate with the SLP in the supervisory process.

■ Consider securing liability insurance.

■ Actively pursue continuing education and professional development activities.

ASHA's (2013) document makes a specific point of highlighting those activities SLPAs should not engage in, as they are specifically outside an SLPA's scope of service (Box 1–1). If you find yourself in a situation during your training or at any point during the course of your employment as an SLPA where you engage in (or are asked to perform) any of these activities, this is a clear warning sign that you should seek immediate assistance in addressing the issue. Chapter 3 discusses ethical dilemmas such as this and recommendations for resolving ethical conflict.

Now that you know what an SLPA must not do, ASHA's 2013 scope-of-practice document also outlines activities that are within the scope of responsibilities of an SLPA, including duties in the areas of service delivery, administrative support, and prevention and advocacy.

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Box 1–1. Activities Outside an SLPA's Scope of Practice
(ASHA, 2013, Responsibilities Outside the Scope of SLPAs, para. 1)[1]

An SLPA must *not*

■ Represent himself or herself as an SLP;

■ Perform standardized or nonstandardized diagnostic tests, formal or informal evaluations, or swallowing screenings and checklists;

■ Perform procedures that require a high level of clinical acumen and technical skill (e.g., vocal tract prosthesis shaping or fitting, vocal tract imaging and oral pharyngeal swallow therapy with bolus material);

■ Tabulate or interpret results and observations of feeding and swallowing evaluations performed by SLPs;

■ Participate in formal parent conferences, case conferences, or any interdisciplinary team without the presence of the supervising SLP or other designated SLP;

■ Provide interpretative information to the student, patient, client, family, or others regarding the patient or client status or service;

■ Write, develop, or modify a student's, patient's, or client's treatment plan in any way;

■ Assist with students, patients, or clients without following the individualized treatment plan prepared by the certified SLP or without access to supervision;

■ Sign any formal documents (e.g., treatment plans, reimbursement forms, or reports);

■ Select students, patients, or clients for service;

■ Discharge a student, patient, or client from services;

■ Make referrals for additional service;

■ Disclose clinical or confidential information either orally or in writing to anyone other than the supervising SLP;

■ Develop or determine the swallowing strategies or precautions for patients, family, or staff;

■ Treat medically fragile students, patients, and clients without supervision; or

■ Design or select augmentative and alternative communication systems or devices.

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Service Delivery

In the area of service delivery, ASHA recommends that SLPAs identify them-selves to clients, clients' families, and fellow service providers, both verbally and in writing, and wear a name badge (ASHA, 2013). Furthermore, as discussed

in Chapter 3, SLPAs are expected to conduct themselves ethically, maintain client confidentiality, and adhere to all federal and state regulations in the provision of services in schools and medical settings. Provided SLPAs are under the direction of a qualified SLP and given adequate training and supervision, Box 1–2 outlines ASHA's recommendations for activities within the scope of an SLPA related to service delivery. SLPAs "may not perform tasks when a supervising SLP cannot be reached by personal contact, phone, pager, or other immediate or electronic means" (ASHA, 2013, Minimum Requirements in Frequency and Amount of Supervision, para. 1).[1] Furthermore, the purpose of an SLPA is to support the SLP in the provision of services, not to increase the caseload numbers of the SLP. ASHA recommends that SLPAs have liability insurance as protection for malpractice during service provision. Your employer may provide this insurance for you or

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Box 1–2. SLPA Scope of Responsibility: Service Delivery
(ASHA, 2013, Service Delivery, para. 1)[1]

■ Assist the SLP with speech, language, and hearing screenings **without** clinical interpretation.
■ Assist the SLP during assessment of students, patients, and clients, exclusive of administration and interpretation.
■ Assist the SLP with bilingual translation during screening and assessment activities exclusive of interpretation.*
■ Follow documented treatment plans or protocols developed by the supervising SLP.
■ Provide guidance and treatment via telepractice to students, patients, and clients who are selected by the supervising SLP as appropriate for this service delivery model.
■ Document student, patient, and client performance (e.g., tally data for the SLP to use; prepare charts, records, and graphs) and report this information to the supervising SLP.
■ Program and provide instruction in the use of augmentative and alternative communication devices.
■ Demonstrate or share information with patients, families, and staff regarding feeding strategies developed and directed by the SLP.
■ Serve as interpreter for patients, clients, students, and families who do not speak English.*
■ Provide services under SLP supervision in another language for individuals who do not speak English and for English-language learners.*

Note: Chapter 5 contains a discussion of the use of SLPAs as interpreters and translators, including ASHA (2004) recommendations for training in this function.

you may be expected to independently acquire liability insurance. This should be done prior to providing services to clients. ASHA offers discounts on this insurance for SLPAs who are affiliated associates.

Administrative Support

In addition to providing clinical services, SLPAs may provide administrative support to their supervisors, including the activities listed in Box 1–3.

Prevention and Advocacy

SLPAs may also assist their supervisors in activities related to the prevention of communicative disorders and advocacy for individuals with communicative disorders and their families. Box 1–4 highlights activities within the scope of responsibilities of an SLPA in this area.

SLPA JOB DESCRIPTION: A DAY IN THE LIFE OF AN SLPA

After reading lists of duties and responsibilities, many SLPAs in training often still ask, "What will my job be like as an SLPA?" This is a valid question to ask but a difficult one to answer. The settings in which SLPAs work are highly variable, as are the populations of individuals for which SLPAs provide services. Equally variable is the nature of tasks SLPAs perform in these different settings. Appendix 1–D recounts several stories, collected from SLPAs throughout the United States, which tell of a "Day in the Life" of a specific SLPA. Lastly, Appendices 1–E and 1–F contain sample job descriptions for SLPAs in medical and educational settings, respectively. Each of these documents sheds a light on different roles of an SLPA. Ultimately, learning firsthand by meeting and speaking directly with SLPAs and SLPs themselves is one of the best ways to explore the field of speech-language pathology and the roles of SLPAs.

COMPETENCY ASSESSMENT

Webster's dictionary defines *competent* as "having requisite or adequate ability or qualities" or "having the capacity to function or develop in a particular way" (Merriam-Webster, 2003). Being a competent SLPA requires knowledge and the practical application of this knowledge in the execution of specific tasks (i.e., skill). In

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Box 1–3. SLPA Scope of Responsibility: Administrative Support
(ASHA, 2013, Administrative Support, para. 1)[1]

■ Assist with clerical duties, such as preparing materials and scheduling activities, as directed by the SLP.
■ Perform checks and maintenance of equipment.
■ Assist with departmental operations (e.g., scheduling, recordkeeping, maintaining supplies and equipment, monitoring equipment safety).