



MEDIA RELEASE

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June is Brain Injury Awareness Month in Canada

Brain injuries are the number one killer and disabler of people under the age of 45 in Canada. These injuries are a common occurrence, with more than 50,000 Canadians a year sustaining a brain injury, according to the Brain Injury Association of Canada (BIAC).

Speech-language pathologists (S-LPs), audiologists and supportive personnel, who are represented by the national professional association the Canadian Association of Speech-Language Pathologists and Audiologists (CASLPA), have an important role to play in this area. Research indicates that 80 to 100 percent of individuals with a brain injury will have some form of communication disorder. Treatment by these professionals is therefore essential, as they “work to maximize communication and, in turn, participation in daily life and activities,” says Sharon Fotheringham, Director of Speech-Language Pathology and Standards for CASLPA.

“Brain injury has far reaching effects on most daily communication activities,” says Ontario speech-language pathologist Justine Hamilton. “If you struggled to read, write, express yourself clearly or remember information, you can imagine the devastating impact this would have on helping your children with their homework, discussing finances with your spouse, taking a college course, sending emails, or simply discussing current events with a friend.”

CASLPA represents the professional needs of more than 5,400 speech-language pathologists, audiologists and supportive personnel. CASLPA has provided leadership in developing recommended wait times for various diagnostic areas through the Pan-Canadian Alliance Wait Times Project. The group recommends that after receiving a S-LP referral due to a traumatic brain injury, the patient should have their first appointment within 24-72 hours if in an acute care facility, 48-72 hours if in an inpatient rehabilitation facility and less than 1 month if an outpatient in the community.

Approaches to treatment and rehabilitation of brain injuries are diverse, as each individual with a brain injury will experience different challenges in speaking, swallowing, reading, listening or hearing. “Considerations include the severity and type of brain injury, time since injury, areas impacted by the injury, supports available to the family, and the environments the client will be in,” says Leslie Hanika Catto, a British Columbia speech-language pathologist. “Approaches are varied, but tend to focus on re-training those skills which have been impaired or reducing the functional disability through accommodations.”

Some simple recommendations to prevent brain injuries include; wearing a helmet during sporting activities, preventing falls, avoiding alcohol and substance abuse, maintaining a healthy lifestyle and wearing your seatbelt. For more information about the role speech-language pathologists, audiologists and supportive personnel play in the treatment of communication disorders or to find a speech-language pathologist or audiologist in your area, visit CASLPA’s website at www.speechandhearing.ca. Additional information about Brain Injury Awareness Month, the Brain Injury Association of Canada and a listing of related events can be found on the BIAC website at www.biac-aclc.ca.

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