



VOICE CARE TEAM

Voice Care Team: Highlights

Concept of a Voice Care Team

A voice care team is an interdisciplinary team of voice professionals typically under the direction of a specialist in ear, nose, and throat medicine, an otolaryngologist or a laryngologist.

- The physician evaluates the voice disorders, determines the cause or causes (**diagnosis**), and provides medical treatment for voice disorders.
- The speech-language pathologist (or phoniatrist in countries without speech-language pathologists) provides voice therapy and attends to problems that affect the speaking voice.
- Other team members may be from any one or more of the following professions: singing voice specialist, acting voice specialist, nurse and/or physician assistant, and consultant physician and non-physician specialists.

Voice Care Team

Voice care has evolved into a sophisticated medical science. Patients with voice disorders are served best by an interdisciplinary team consisting of physicians and non-physicians.

- The physician may be a specialist who practices all aspects of ear, nose, and throat medicine (**otolaryngologist**), or an otolaryngologist who further subspecializes in voice disorders (**laryngologist**).
- The physician collaborates with non-physician voice professionals such as: speech-language pathologist, singing voice specialist, and/or acting voice specialist.
- As a medical care team, other key professionals of the voice team are consultants from different medical and non-medical specialties: neurologist, psychiatrist, psychologist, as well as the voice team nurse and/or physician assistant and/or medical assistant.

Specialized Training

Under the best of circumstances, all members of the voice team have received special training in the care of the voice in addition to general aspects of their disciplines respectively.

Although even the best training does not guarantee clinical excellence, it does improve the probability that a practitioner will provide superior, modern voice care.

Voice Care Not Just For Performing Artists

Although the highest-visibility patients for the voice care team are performing artists, who have strong professional demands on their voice, a voice care team provides care to anyone with voice problems – all professions, all ages.

Voice Health as a Basic Component of Well-Being

Increasingly, voice problems are recognized as critical clues to uncovering not just medical health problems, but also mental and emotional health problems.

The recognition of the importance of voice health for the total well-being increases the challenge to the voice care team and highlights the importance of the team concept of multidisciplinary professionals.

Otolaryngologist/Laryngologist

The leader of the voice care team is typically a surgeon who specializes in ear, nose, and throat medicine (**otolaryngologist**) or an otolaryngologist who has further subspecialized in the larynx, voice, and related problems such as swallowing (**laryngologist**).

Education and Training Track

Subspecialization in laryngology in the United States requires the series of educational and training programs outlined below.

- Undergraduate degree
- Medical degree
- 1-2 years of general surgery residency
- 4 years of otolaryngology-head and neck surgery (Board-eligibility by the American Board of Otolaryngology or equivalent organization in other countries)
- 1 year clinical experience and competency on written and oral exam (Board certification)

Scope of Practice

Most otolaryngologists' clinical practices include many or all components of the specialty, such as:

- disorders of the ear and related structures (**otology**)
- Disorders of the voice and upper airway structures such as the throat and trachea (laryngology)
- Head and neck cancer, head and neck neoplasms (masses including benign or malignant lesions)
- Facial plastic and reconstructive surgery
- Allergy and immunology
- Bronchoesophagology (lower airway and swallowing disorders)
- Rhinology (nose, sinus, taste and smell disorders)
- Pediatric otolaryngology (ear, nose, and throat disorders of children)

Most otolaryngologists and laryngologists care for patients of all ages from early childhood through advanced years. Some otolaryngologists subspecialize in caring for disorders in just one or two of the areas of otolaryngology described above. This subspecialization can either be a keen interest in a specific area while still providing a broad range of ear, nose, and throat care, or focused practice of only one or two of the subcomponents of otolaryngology. Laryngology is one such subspecialty.

Brief History of Laryngology

At present, most of the physicians specializing in laryngology did not receive laryngology fellowship training. That is always the case as a new field develops. Modern laryngology evolved out of an interest in caring for professional voice users – teachers, clergy, singers, etc. So, most of the senior laryngologists practicing at the turn of the 21st century were involved in the evolution of the field before fellowships were developed. Most fellowship training programs started in the 1990's, although a few informal fellowship programs existed in the 1980's and earlier. It is reasonable to expect most voice specialists who finished residency training in the 1990's or later to have completed a fellowship in laryngology.

Laryngology Training Programs

There are approximately a dozen laryngology fellowship training programs in the United States. At present, completion of a fellowship is a reasonably good indicator of superior knowledge and clinical training in laryngology. Most laryngology fellowships include training in the diagnosis and treatment of voice disorders in adults and children, neurolaryngology (neurological problems that affect the voice and larynx), swallowing disorders, airway reconstruction, laryngeal cancer, and laryngeal surgery.

Spectrum of Voice Disorders

Typically, laryngologists provide care (diagnosis and treatment) for both routine and complex problems that affect the voice.

- the common cold – especially when it affects the voice of a professional singer or actor
- structural lesions such as nodules or polyps
- prolonged infections of the vocal folds
- cancer
- traumatic injury from fracture or internal trauma (intubation injuries from anesthesia, vocal fold injuries from previous surgery)
- neurological disorders and other voice problems.

Scope of Responsibilities

The laryngologist is responsible for establishing a medical diagnosis and implementing or coordinating treatment for the patient. The laryngologist may prescribe medication, inject botulinum toxin, perform delicate microsurgery on the vocal folds, or operate on the laryngeal skeleton.

The laryngologist is also usually responsible for initiating evaluation by other members of the voice team and for generating referrals to other specialists as needed.

Perspective on Practice

Laryngologists may practice in university medical centers or private offices; and in major cities in the United States they are usually affiliated with a voice team including at least a speech-language pathologist, a singing voice specialist and sometimes an acting voice specialist. Laryngologists should also have, or have access to, a clinical voice laboratory with equipment to analyze the voice objectively and a stroboscope to visualize the vocal folds in "slow motion". They also should be familiar with physicians in other specialties who have an understanding and interest in arts medicine. Even for patients with a voice disorder who are not singers and actors, such knowledge and sensitivity is important. Just as non-athletes benefit from the orthopedic expertise of a sports-medicine specialist, voice patients receive specialized expert care from physicians trained to treat singers, the "Olympic athletes" of the voice world.

Medical Societies for Laryngologists

At present, there is no official additional certification for those who have completed a laryngology fellowship. However, there are organizations (medical societies) with which many of the leading laryngologists are affiliated, such as:

- American Academy of Otolaryngology-Head and Neck Surgery (www.entnet.org) or equivalent in other countries
- American Laryngological Association (ALA), the most senior otolaryngology society in the United States (www.alahns.org)
- American Bronchoesophagological Association (www.abea.net)
- Voice Foundation (www.voicefoundation.org)

While membership in these organizations is not a guarantee of excellence in practice, it suggests interest and knowledge in laryngology, particularly voice disorders.

Speech-Language Pathologist

The speech-language pathologist is a key member of the Voice Care Team, and is a certified, licensed healthcare professional, ordinarily with either a master's or doctoral degree.

Education - Training - Certification Track

After college, speech-language pathologists generally complete a one- or two-year master's degree program, followed by a nine-month, supervised "clinical fellowship," similar to a medical internship. At the conclusion of the clinical fellowship year, speech-language pathologists in the United States are certified by the American Speech-Language Hearing Association, and use the letters "CCC-SLP" after their names to indicate that they are certified.

Spectrum of Disorders in the Care of a Speech Language Pathologist

Like otolaryngology, speech-language pathology is a broad field that includes care of patients who have:

- had strokes or other neurological problems affecting speech and swallowing
- undergone laryngectomy (removal of the larynx)
- swallowing disorders
- articulation problems
- stuttering problems
- craniofacial disorders
- other related fluency disorders of speech

Concept of Subspecialty in Voice – "Voice Pathologist"

Some speech-language pathologists subspecialize in voice, which includes care of the voice, and swallowing disorders. The speech-language pathologist affiliated with a voice team is usually such a subspecialist, and is often referred to as a "voice pathologist" – although the term "voice pathologist" has not yet received official recognition by the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association.

Training Programs

Training as a voice team speech language pathologist is evolving to better provide speech-language pathology training programs that provide extensive education in voice and voice disorders. Ideally, voice team speech-language pathologists should have had training in and become comfortable with caring for individuals with voice problems. Subspecialty training is usually acquired through apprenticeships, extra courses, symposia, or by obtaining a doctoral degree that includes voice-related research.

Scope of Responsibilities

Speech-language pathologists are responsible for voice therapy and rehabilitation which is analogous to physical therapy. The speech-language pathologist analyzes voice use, and teaches proper breath support, relaxation, and voice placement to optimize speaking. A variety of techniques are utilized to accomplish this goal. Speech-language pathologists do not ordinarily work with the singing voice, although they are involved in the treatment of speaking voices of singers.

Perspective on Practice

Speech-language pathologists may be found in universities, private offices, or freestanding speech and hearing centers. In the United States, most are members of the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association and its voice-related special interest division (SID-3). Many speech-language pathologists with special interest in voice in the United States and elsewhere are also members of the Voice Foundation.

Role of Subspecialization in Voice Care

Like otolaryngologists, speech-language pathologists who subspecialize in voice care provide more incisive, state-of-the-art

treatment for voice disorders than most general speech-language pathologists who care for patients with various problems encompassing the entire field. So, it is worthwhile for patients with voice disorders to seek out a subspecialist to improve the likelihood of rapid, excellent treatment results. Referrals to speech-language pathologists specializing in voice are usually obtained through a laryngologist or otolaryngologist.

Singing and Acting Voice Specialists

Singing Voice Specialist

The singing voice specialist is a singing teacher with special training equipping him or her to practice in a medical environment with patients who have sustained vocal injury. Most singing voice specialists have a degree in voice performance or pedagogy. Some have extensive performing and teaching experience, but without a formal academic degree. Nearly all have professional performance experience, as well as extra training in laryngeal anatomy and physiology of phonation, training in the rehabilitation of injured voices, and other special education.

Requirements to Be Part of Voice Team

The singing voice specialist must acquire knowledge of anatomy and physiology of the normal and disordered voice, a basic understanding of the principles of laryngology and medications, and a fundamental knowledge of the principles and practices of speech-language pathology. This information is not part of the traditional training of singing teachers.

Training of Voice Team Singing Voice Specialist

Currently, there are no formal training or fellowship programs that assist singing teachers in becoming a singing voice specialist. Training is usually acquired by apprenticeship and observation. Many take courses in speech-language pathology programs, but usually not as part of a formal degree or certification program since there is no official certification of singing voice specialists.

A few of the best singing voice specialists are also certified, licensed speech-language pathologists. This combination is optimal, provided the speech-language pathologist has sufficient experience and training not only as a performing artist, but also as a teacher of singing. In patients with vocal injuries or problems, the fundamental approach to training the singing voice is different in important ways from that usually used with healthy students in a singing studio. Hence, even an excellent and experienced voice teacher may harm an injured voice if he or she is not familiar with the special considerations for this population. In addition, most voice teachers do not feel comfortable working with a singer who has had a vocal injury or surgery.

Perspective on Practice

Virtually all singing voice specialists are affiliated with voice care teams. Most are members of the National Association of Teachers of Singing (NATS) or the equivalent organization in another country, and of the Voice Foundation. In many cases, their practices are limited to work with injured voices. They work not only with singers, but also with other patients with voice disorders. As a member of the voice treatment team working with non-singers, they help teach speakers the "athletic" techniques utilized by singers for voice production. Singing is to speaking as running is to walking. When rehabilitating someone who has difficulty walking, if the person can be helped to jog or run, leg strength and endurance improve and walking rehabilitation is expedited. The singing voice specialist helps apply similar principles to voice rehabilitation, in collaboration with the speech-language pathologist and other voice care team members.

Acting Voice Specialist

Acting voice specialists are also called voice coaches, drama voice teachers, and voice consultants. Traditionally, these professionals have been associated closely with the theater. Their skills have been utilized as part of a medical voice team only since the mid-1990's. Consequently, there are few acting-voice trainers with medical experience, but their contributions have proven invaluable.

Scope of Work

Acting voice trainers use a variety of behavior modification techniques that have been designed to enhance vocal communication, quality, projection, and endurance in theatrical settings. They train actors to speak or scream through eight shows a week without tiring or causing injury to their voices, and/or theatrical runs that may last years. Acting voice specialists also teach techniques for adding emotional expression to vocal delivery, and they work with body language and posture to optimize vocal delivery and communication of information.

Role in the Voice Team

Acting voice specialists are great assets to the voice team in teaching people how to apply the many skills learned through the speech-language pathologist and singing voice specialist to their everyday life. Acting voice specialists are especially valuable for people who speak professionally such as teachers, lecturers, politicians, clergy, sales personnel, and others concerned with effective vocal delivery and with vocal endurance.

Education and Training Track

There are no formal programs that prepare voice coaches to work in a medical milieu. Those who do receive training generally do so through apprenticeships and in collaboration with medical voice care teams, under the direction of a laryngologist.

Professional Societies for Acting Voice Specialists

Acting voice specialists interested in working with voice patients are generally members of the Voice and Speech Trainers Association (VASTA) and the Voice Foundation.

Multidisciplinary Professionals

Phoniatrists

Phoniatrists do not exist in the United States, but they provide voice care in many European countries. The phoniatrist is a physician who is in some ways a hybrid of the laryngologist and speech-language pathologist. Phoniatrists receive medical training in diagnosis and treatment of voice, swallowing, and language disorders, including voice therapy; but they do not perform surgery. In countries with phoniatrists, surgery is performed by otolaryngologists. In many cases, the phoniatrist and otolaryngologist collaborate as a team, just as otolaryngologists and speech-language pathologists do in the United States and elsewhere. A physician who has completed training in phoniatry is generally well-qualified to diagnose voice disorders and provide non-surgical medical care, as well as voice therapy.

Nurse

Nurses are important members of the voice team in many centers. Nurses who work closely with a laryngologist generally have vast experience in the diagnosis and treatment of voice disorders. They are wonderful information resources for patients and frequently provide much of the patient education in busy clinical settings. Such nurses are usually members of the Society of Otolaryngology-Head and Neck Nurses (SOHN). Nurses with advanced knowledge and skills may be certified (by SOHN) as otolaryngology nurses, and are identified as such by the initials "CORLN" (certified otolaryngologic nurse) after their names.

Education and Training Track

Nurse practitioners are advanced practice nurses with master's degrees who are licensed to provide independent care for patients with selected medical problems. They are identified by the initials "CRNP" (certified registered nurse practitioner). They work in conjunction with a physician, but they can examine, diagnose, and treat selected problems relatively independently. A few nurse practitioners specialize in otolaryngology and work with voice teams. They ordinarily receive special training "on the job" with the otolaryngologist, and they provide care within their scope of practice. Nurse practitioners can also become members of SOHN, become certified through examination by SOHN, and upon certification will also use the certification CORLN after their names.

Physician Assistants and Medical Assistants

Physician assistants, like nurse practitioners discussed above, function in association with a physician. Physician assistants graduate from a training program that usually lasts four years and teaches them various aspects of medical diagnosis and physical examination. They use the initials "PA" (physician assistant) after their names. They practice in conjunction with physicians but can perform examinations and treat patients independently. They are licensed in many states to write prescriptions. A few physician assistants specialize in otolaryngology, and a smaller number have had extensive training and experience in voice care. In collaboration with their laryngologist and voice teams, these PAs are qualified to evaluate and treat patients with voice disorders.

Physician assistants should be distinguished from "medical assistants" who have less training and are qualified to assist in medical care and patient education, but generally not to diagnose and treat patients independently. Medical assistants generally are trained to perform tasks such as phlebotomy (drawing blood) and perform electrocardiograms. In a laryngology office, a good medical assistant can be trained to perform many other tasks such as taking histories, assisting with stroboscoped laryngoscopy, assisting during the performance of surgical procedures in the office, participating in research, and other tasks.

Consultant Medical Professionals

Otolaryngologists often refer voice patients for consultation with other medical professionals. Other specialists consulted commonly include:

- Neurologist: specializes in brain and nerve disorders
- Pulmonologist: lungs and respiratory system disorders
- Gastroenterologist: stomach and intestinal system

- Psychiatrist: mental health

However, physicians, in virtually any medical specialty, may be called upon to care for voice patients.

Consultant Non-medical Professionals

Other professional specialists who may also be involved in voice care are:

- Psychologist
- Nutritionists
- Physical therapists
- Chiropractors
- Osteopaths
- Acupuncturists
- Others

Developments in Voice Care

New Concept of Performing Arts Medicine

Within virtually all these fields, there are a select few professionals who have an interest in and an understanding of performing arts medicine – care of performing artists. Just as caring for voice professionals (especially singers) involves special considerations and challenges for the otolaryngologist, caring for hand problems in a pianist or ankle problems in dancers also poses challenges for the orthopedic surgeon.

Orthopedic surgeons, neurologists, pulmonologists, and others who are accustomed to working with performing artists (dancers, wind instrumentalists, etc.) are most likely to have the insight, sensitivities, skills, and state-of-the-art information needed to provide optimal care to voice professionals. Many such physicians tend to be associated with arts medicine centers or are performers themselves.

No Current Training-Certification Program for Performing Arts Medicine

There is no certification or broad-based national or international organization that helps to identify physicians who concentrate on performing arts medicine, although some are members of the Performing Arts Medicine Association (PAMA). In most fields, there are no formal arts-medicine training programs or associations. Physicians acquire such training through their own interests and initiative, and through apprenticeship or observation with colleagues.

Referral Pathways for Performing Arts Medicine

If there is no arts-medicine center in the area in which a patient is seeking care, arts-medicine physicians are identified best by word of mouth or through arts-medicine-related websites. Referrals can be obtained through the local laryngologist or voice specialist, or by consulting with eminent performing arts teachers in the community. For example, the leading private, university, and conservatory violin and piano teachers often know who the best hand specialists are; the wind instrument teachers know whom to see for neurological and pulmonary problems that affect musicians; and dance teachers know the best foot-and-ankle physicians.

Evolving Performing Arts Medicine – A Role in Voice Care for All

Since voice plays such a key role in humanity as a whole and with personal meaning to each individual human life, all initiatives in voice care development driven by the unique needs of performing artists provide new voice care avenues for all.

Voice care is a key element of medical science. Voice health is a key element of patient total well-being. Patients with voice disorders are served best by a comprehensive voice team that coordinates the skills of professionals trained in various disciplines. It is important for the voice team to be interdisciplinary and to affiliate with arts-medicine specialists and other disciplines to provide comprehensive care for all voice patients.

It is also important for patients to be educated about the kind of health care that is now available for voice disorders and how to evaluate and select health care providers.

 **Advisory Note**

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