Clinical Supervisor Characteristics Valued by Practising Speech-language Therapists

Helen Mataiti, Dr Megan McAuliffe, & Gina Tillard

University of Canterbury, Christchurch, New Zealand

BACKGROUND

- Few studies have examined which characteristics of clinical supervisors are valued by practising clinicians.

- Supervisor characteristics valued by student supervisees include: Interpersonal competence; affirming personal values/ attitudes; professional knowledge; clinical skills; teaching ability; administration skills; and an ability to make the supervisee feel safe[1-4].

- A study from the field of nursing suggested that practising clinicians perceive personal characteristics and interpersonal qualities to be important in a clinical supervisor[5].

- Furthermore, developmental models of competence and clinical supervision suggest clinicians with less experience have different clinical supervision needs[6-9].

RESEARCH AIMS

- To examine the knowledge, attitude, and skill characteristics of a clinical supervisor that are perceived to be of value by speech-language therapists practising in New Zealand.

- Determine if the attitudes of experienced clinicians (>5 years clinical practice) and less experienced clinicians (<5 years clinical practice) differ in regard to characteristics perceived to be of value in a clinical supervisor.

HYPOTHESES

- A clinical supervisor's interpersonal knowledge, skills and personal values/attitude characteristics are valued by supervisees as much, or more than, clinical competence, professional knowledge, and identity.

- The views of less experienced clinicians will differ significantly to those of more experienced clinicians.

METHOD

- **Participants:** Seventy-two speech-language therapists currently practising in New Zealand (6% male, 94% female). See figure 1 for work sectors represented.

METHOD

- **Tasks:** Completion of a self-administered survey instrument, either manually or by computer.

- **Survey Instrument:** Consisted of five sections: (1) demographic data; (2) current clinical supervision situation; (3) 50 statements regarding valued knowledge, attitude, and skill characteristics; (4) rank order exercise; and (5) open ended comment.

- Statements in section 3 began with the carrier phrase – "It is important to me that a clinical supervisor....". Participants were instructed that responses should not necessarily be in relation to their current clinical supervisor.

- A 100 millimetre visual analogue scale was used for response recording. Text stating *strongly agree* and *strongly disagree* were positioned underneath, equal distance from either end of the scale.

- **Statistics:** Mann-Whitney U tests with alpha at 0.001 (Bonferroni adjusted due to large number of comparisons) were completed to determine if significant differences existed between the experienced and less experienced clinician groups.

Table 1: Ten Supervisor Characteristics Perceived as Most Important by the Group (n=72).

Statement	Mean	SD
1 . Listens carefully to me	93.6	(7.9)
2 . Keeps everything we discuss confidential	92.0	(11.8)
3 . Asks questions and makes comments that make me think	91.6	(11.1)
4 . Allows me to ask questions	91.3	(12.9)
5 . Is honest	90.4	(16.1)
6 . Is positive about meeting with me	90.4	(13.0)
7 . Is supportive	90.0	(15.4)
8 . Is an effective communicator	89.3	(13.9)
9 . Helps me see my mistakes as learning opportunities	89.1	(11.6)
10. Is genuine in interactions	88.7	(17.6)

RESULTS

- Overall, interpersonal characteristics and positive personal values and attitudes were perceived as most important (see table 1).

- Results also showed that professional identity and knowledge characteristics were perceived as the least important.

Figure 1: *Work sector of participants.*
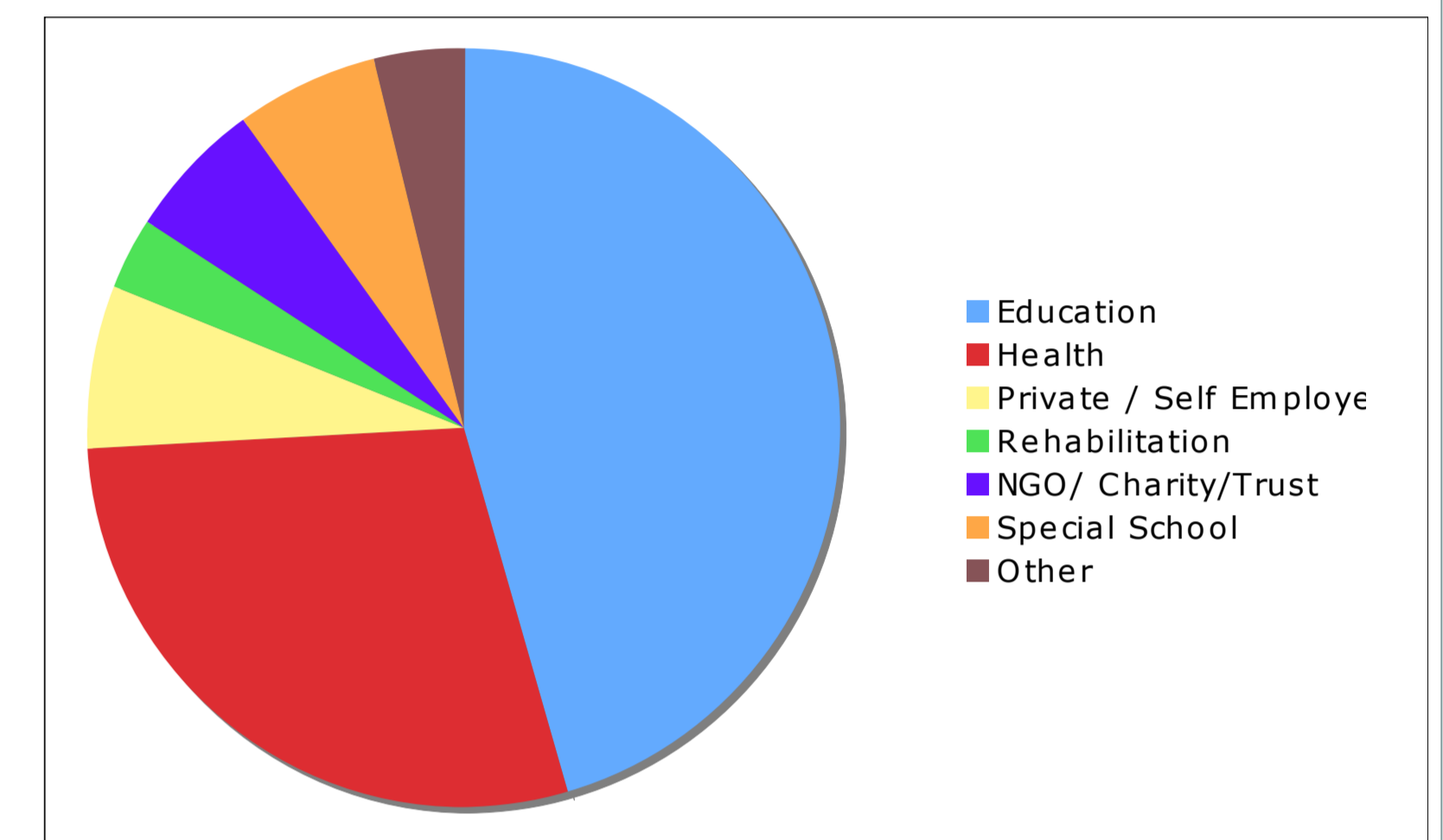
- Statistically, there was little difference between the perceptions of experiences versus less experienced clinicians. Only one significant difference was observed - "suggests techniques I can use in my practice". This was valued by less experienced speech-language therapists more than those with >5 years experience.

DISCUSSION

- Practising clinicians valued similar characteristics in their clinical supervisor regardless of experience level, because they can all be seen as learners.

- Practising clinicians may require clinical supervision focussed on individual wellbeing and supporting experiences in the workplace as opposed to supervision related to professional practice issues.

- A clinical supervisor of practising clinicians may require training in the use of methods appropriate to an individual clinician's needs.

- Future research should: (1) employ random sampling methods or use alternative research designs; (2) increase participant numbers; and (3) comprehensively analyse data across different work experience levels.

REFERENCES
1. Cochran, A., Paukert, J. L., Scales, E. M., & Neumayer, L. A. (2004). How medical students define surgical mentors. The American Journal of Surgery,187, 698-701.
2. Oratio, A. R., Sugarman, M., & Prass, M. (1981). A multivariate analysis of clinicians' perceptions of supervisory effectiveness. Journal of Communication Disorders, 14, 31-42.
3. Tang, F., Chou, S., & Chiang, H. (2005). Students perceptions of effective and ineffective clinical instructors. Journal of Nursing Education, 44(4), 187-192.
4. Shanfield, S., Hetherly, V., & Matthews, K. (2001). Excellent supervision: the residents' perspective. Journal of Psychotherapy Practice and Research, 10(1), 23-27.
5. Sloan, G. (1999). Good characteristics of a clinical supervisor: a community mental health perspective. Journal of Advanced Nursing, 30(3), 713-722.
6. Anderson, J. L. (1988). The supervisory process in Speech Language Pathology and Audiology. Boston, Massachusetts: College-Hill Press.
7. Benner, P. (1982). From novice to expert. The American Journal of Nursing, 82(3), 402-407.
8. Hollaway, E. L. (1994). A bridge of knowing: the scholar-practitioner of supervision. Counselling Psychology Quarterly, 7, 3-15.
9. Stoltenberg, C. (2005). Enhancing professional competence through developmental approaches to supervision. American Psychologist, 60(8), 857-864.