

My Career Interview by Diana Darling

This week, I had the privilege of interviewing Speech Language Pathologist (SLP), Kristoffer Jenkins. I was surprised when he informed me that, "...speech is only a small part of what (he does)." He enlightened me about the world in speech language pathology, and I was able to gather a lot about his work and personal life. The job of an SLP is really wonderful, because they change lives, and have a myriad of opportunities available to them such as working in multiple settings, traveling and are very employable. Here is my conversation with Kris:

Q: What is the job description of an SLP?

A: We diagnose and treat disorders of swallowing, speech, language and cognition. We mainly work with functions of the brain, and can also treat memory, attention, and executive function.

Q: What age ranges have you worked with and what is your favorite?

A: My patients have ranged in the age from birth to 105. My favorite would probably be 13 or older.

Q: What kind of settings does an SLP work in?

A: An SLP can work in the school or medical settings. Working in schools means helping kids with learning disabilities, like helping a child with autism learn about non-verbal communication and irony or idioms, meaning not taking phrases so literally. SLPs in the medical field work with many different kinds of patients, like stroke victims, who have neurological damage and need help swallowing, etc.

Q: Where did you go to college and what is your education level?

A: I had some credits from being in the army, got my associate's degree at Umpqua Community College, and got my bachelor's and master's degree at University of Oregon.

Q: What kind of activities do you implement with your patients?

A: On the medical side, we do a lot of exercises based on their condition, and I frequently will educate my patients and their families about their treatment. In schools, I do many curriculum related activities.

Q: What is your favorite part of your job?

A: I really enjoy being able to restore a person's function and motivating patients to help them see the end goal of their treatment. I am also very passionate about working in the medical side of speech language pathology. I really love having a big challenge and seeing the long term progress.

Q: What do your hours usually look like?

A: It depends on the environment. In hospitals, I was working 12-13 hour days, I work 40 hours in home health, and you have to work at least 3 days at schools.

Q: How much do you interact with patients' families?

A: In home health, it is 100% of the time, and in schools I will inform the parents of the individualized education plans, and will send out quarterly progress reports.

Q: Why did you decide to go into this career, and are you satisfied?

A: Originally, I wanted to pursue a career in music education, but my VA counselor said that there was not enough work in this field, so I decided to major in Communication Sciences and Disorders, because my kids were in speech therapy at the time, and I wanted to work with children. I am very satisfied with my job.

Q: What is the difference from an SLP and an SLPA (assistant)?

A: An SLPA can only work in schools and can only do therapy sessions based on goals written by the SLP, and there is certain required supervised time by the SLP every month. However, the SLP's do the individualized education plans and have more paperwork, whereas, SLPA's get to solely implement activities.

Q: Have you gone to any SLP conferences or special trainings?

A: Yes-- I go to the state conference every year, I am trained in neuromuscular electrical stimulation, I attend the OHSU movement clinic trainings annually, and am certified for a stroke technique called myofascial release.

Q: Would you consider yourself a community leader, and if so, why?

A: Yes, in the sense that I am often a medical referral source for patients' treatment plans, working with doctors and special ed teachers.