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Audiology Assistants and Hearing Instrument Specialists – The Key to Efficiency in the Audiology Practice, in partnership with the American Academy of Audiology

Kristin Davis, AuD

Nichole Kingham, AuD, ABA



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- Financial: Kristin Davis is the owner of Davis Audiology with 4 locations in South Carolina. She received an honorarium from AudiologyOnline for this presentation. Non-Financial: Kristin Davis reports no non-financial disclosures.
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- The applicability and accuracy of the course content may vary by the clinical, geographical, and cultural context; you should evaluate the course accordingly.
- As healthcare is rapidly evolving, new findings may change the validity of the information presented in this course. Providers should always consult the latest research and guidelines from professional associations.
- The interventions discussed in this course may be limited in generalizability, requiring practitioners to consider specific individual and population factors.
- The course may not cover all possible risk factors, diagnostic methods, or treatment options, and complex cases may require additional considerations.
- Healthcare providers should apply cultural competence and sensitivity to ensure effective and respectful care based on their patients' diverse needs.
- Providers should always evaluate the limitations of diagnostic and screening tools, considering their potential for false results as well as any ethical implications.
- It is the responsibility of course participants to critically evaluate the evidence from multiple sources to guide professional practice.

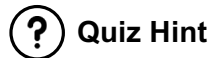
Learning Outcomes

After this course, participants will be able to:

- Describe the defined roles and responsibilities of Audiology Assistants and Hearing Instrument Specialists within various practice settings.
- Identify at least three strategies for effectively delegating clinical and administrative tasks to support workflow efficiency.
- Explain how to evaluate their current practice model and outline specific changes to improve team-based care and optimize staff utilization.

What is an Audiology Extender?

- “An **Audiology Extender** refers to a trained support professional—such as an **Audiology Assistant** or **Hearing Instrument Specialist (HIS)** — who works under the supervision of an audiologist to improve efficiency and enhance patient care within an audiology practice. These team members help streamline workflows, allowing audiologists to focus on more complex clinical tasks while ensuring that routine services and administrative duties are effectively managed.” ~ Nichole Kingham, AuD



Bray/Amlani article

“A New analysis of the audiology workforce”

- According to a 2022 article, by Dr.(s) Bray & Amlani, unless immediate action is taken to increase the number of audiologists entering the workforce, there will not be enough to meet the needs of the public in the years to come.
- In 2000, there was one audiologist for every 1,646 adults with hearing loss.
- By 2030, there will only be one audiologist to serve every 2,283 adults with hearing loss.

There is a dearth of audiologists, in fact it's actually a shrinking profession relative to the fact that hearing loss is growing because we have an aging society. There aren't enough hearing instrument specialists to fill the gap either.

— *Dr. Nicholas Reed, Johns Hopkins University*

Who is doing the work to meet the hearing healthcare needs of the US population?

During the last decade—while the Audiology workforce grew 15%—the HIS workforce grew by greater than 100%

It is time to take control of the future service delivery model for hearing healthcare!

It's time to embrace the mindset of a positive business working model between audiologists and hearing instrument specialists to best meet the needs of the public and help them have a successful hearing journey throughout their lives

✓ Goals

Why Might You Need an Audiology Assistant or Hearing Instrument Specialist?

Survey: “What Are Your Goals?”

Goal 1: Improve patient care by increasing bandwidth

Goal 2: Providers see more \$-generating appointments

Goal 3: Have more walk-in times

Goal 4: Do more marketing

Goal 5: Control the paperwork nightmare

Goal 6: Decrease non-essential appt's for Providers

Goal 7: Add Aural Rehab to clinic offerings

Goal 8: Have someone else to answer phones

Goal 9: Provide more accessories / POS

Goal 10: GET HOME AT A DECENT HOUR (TIME)

**A goal without a plan is
just a wish.**

Antoine de Saint-Exupéry

The Goal of Adding Audiology Extenders



Meet revenue goals



Amplify your message (best patient care)



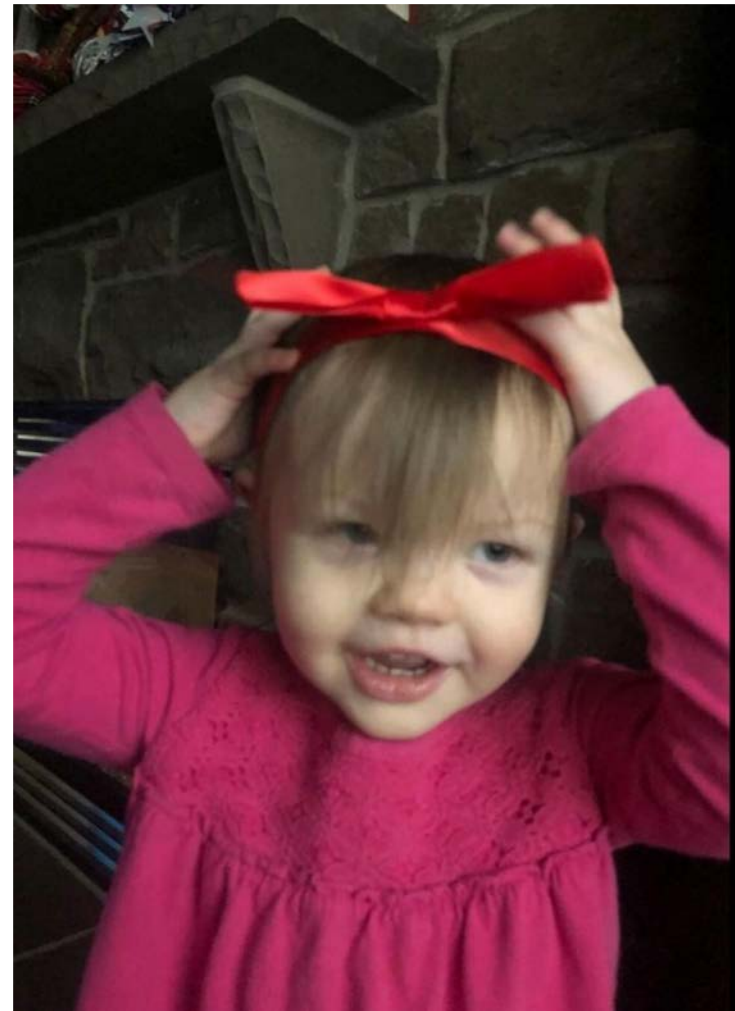
Create efficiency and capacity (bandwidth)



TIME



Create an environment focused on customer service



What's your plan?

✓ Plan

Create a Plan for Adding Staff





The “S” Stands For...

SANITY



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So...HIS or AA? What's the Difference?

AA's will perform:

- Tasks that are instrumental to practice success but do **not** require SPECIALIZED TRAINING
- TASKS THAT INCREASE THE BANDWIDTH OF THE **PROVIDERS**
- *Non-revenue-generating tasks*
 - Administrative Tasks
 - Hearing Instrument – related tasks
 - Equipment Maintenance
 - Patient Education and Training
 - Testing Support
 - Other Support Functions

So...HIS or AA? What's the Difference?

HIS's will perform:

- Tasks that are instrumental to practice success and **may** require SPECIALIZED TRAINING (And licensure)
- TASKS THAT INCREASE THE BANDWIDTH OF THE AUDIOLOGISTS
- *MOSTLY REVENUE-GENERATING TASKS*
 - Hearing Aid Evaluations & Fitting
 - Hearing Aid Troubleshooting
 - Feedback Management
 - Patient Education and Training
 - Fine Tuning
 - Third Party Evaluations and Fittings
 - Triage

Hearing Instrument–related Tasks

- Hearing instrument/ALD ordering
- Hearing instrument/ALD repair
- ACCESSORY/POS SALES
- **Hearing instrument cleaning***
- **Walk-in appointments***
- **6-month checks***
- **Initial program to first fit***
- Hearing Instrument Test box

TIME SAVINGS TO THE AUDIOLOGIST: 15 HOURS/WEEK

Patient Education and Training

- Hearing instrument orientation
- BLUETOOTH / APP CONNECTION & EDUCATION
- **Hearing Protection Devices***
- **Bluetooth custom molds***
- Aural rehabilitation/LACE*
- Hearing Assistance Technology

TIME SAVINGS TO AUDIOLOGIST: 9 HOURS/WEEK

Testing Support

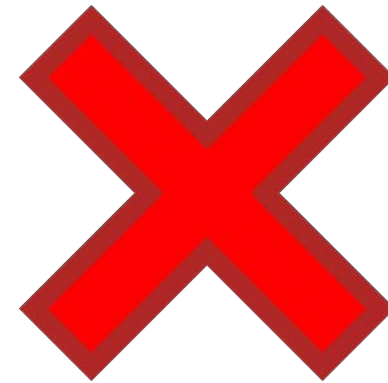
- Fixed Protocol Immittance testing
 - without interpretation ~ Audiology Assistants
- Otoscopic check
- Collect and score self-assessment forms
- QuickSIN
- Hearing Screening
 - **MEDICARE**
- Third Party Hearing Screenings



Billing Issues?

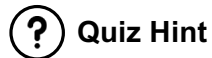
Testing No-No's

- Tinnitus Evaluations
- Balance Evaluations
- Auditory Processing Evaluations
- Child testing (under 18)
- Medicare Hearing Tests
- Auditory Brainstem Response
- Independent Medical Exams



“Scope Creep”

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An Audiology Assistant Cannot

- Perform diagnostic testing (in a private practice)
- Interpret test findings
- Provide counseling regarding diagnosis
- Select or recommend hearing instruments
- Make referrals for additional testing
- Modify an earmold or hearing aid if that modification affects the output of the hearing aid at the eardrum
- EAR CLEANING / EARWASH



Disclaimer

Check the department of health websites in the state where your clinic resides in order to determine the requirements for licensure, certification or both for employing an Audiology Assistant and/or HIS.

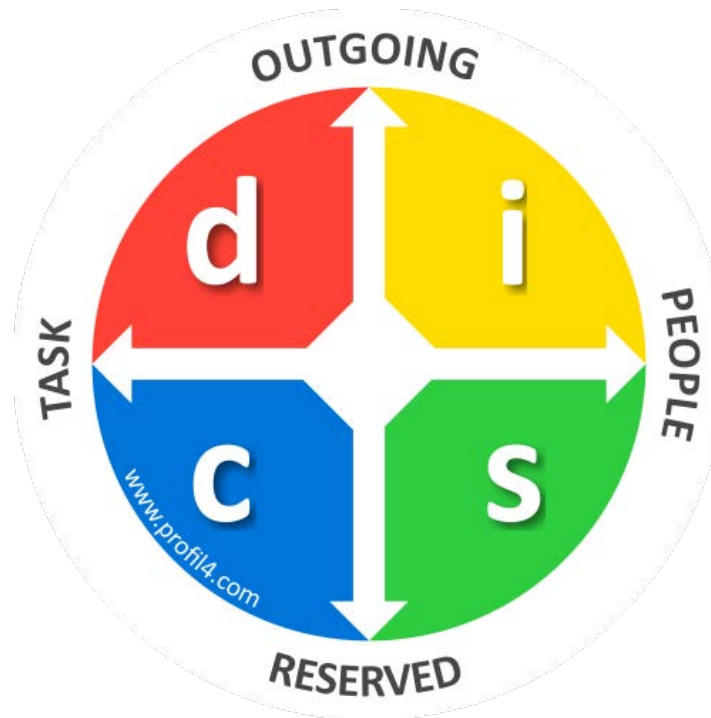
www.AudiologyAcademy.com/state-requirements
ASHA.com

Ensuring that Excellent Patient Care is Maintained

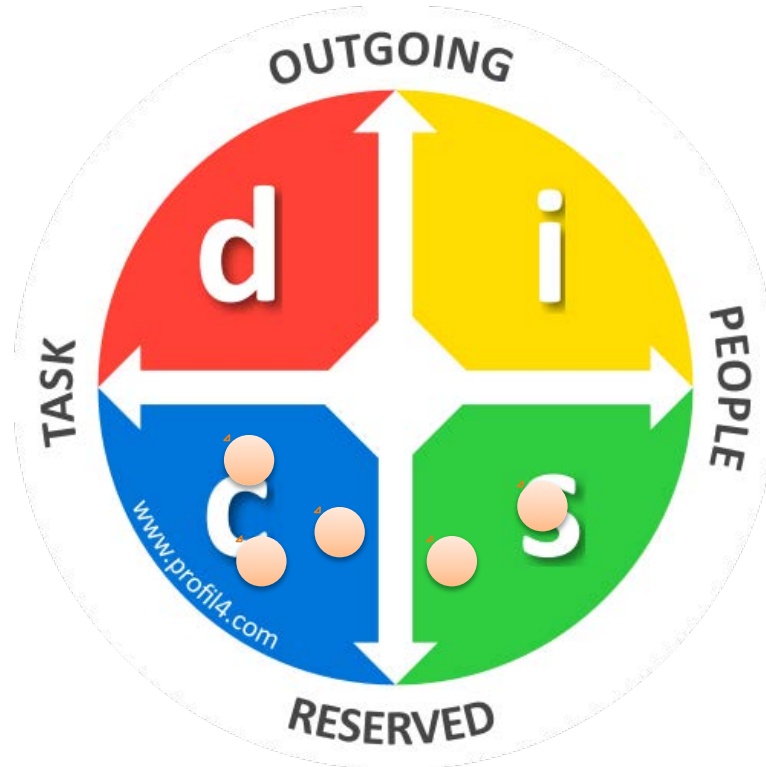
- Hire the right person
- Establish clear understanding of job functions
- Be transparent when discussing business goals
- Constant training
- Consistent training



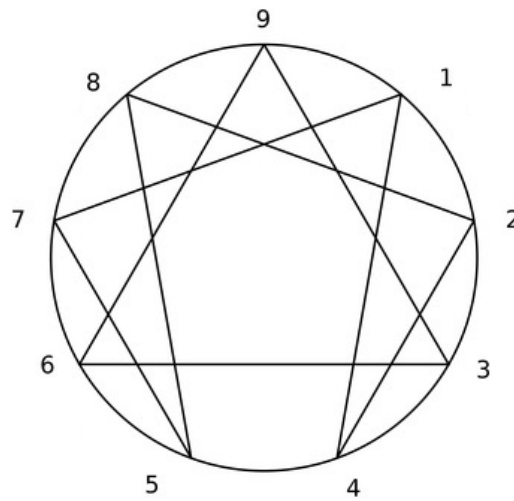
Use Personality Tests to Hire Well



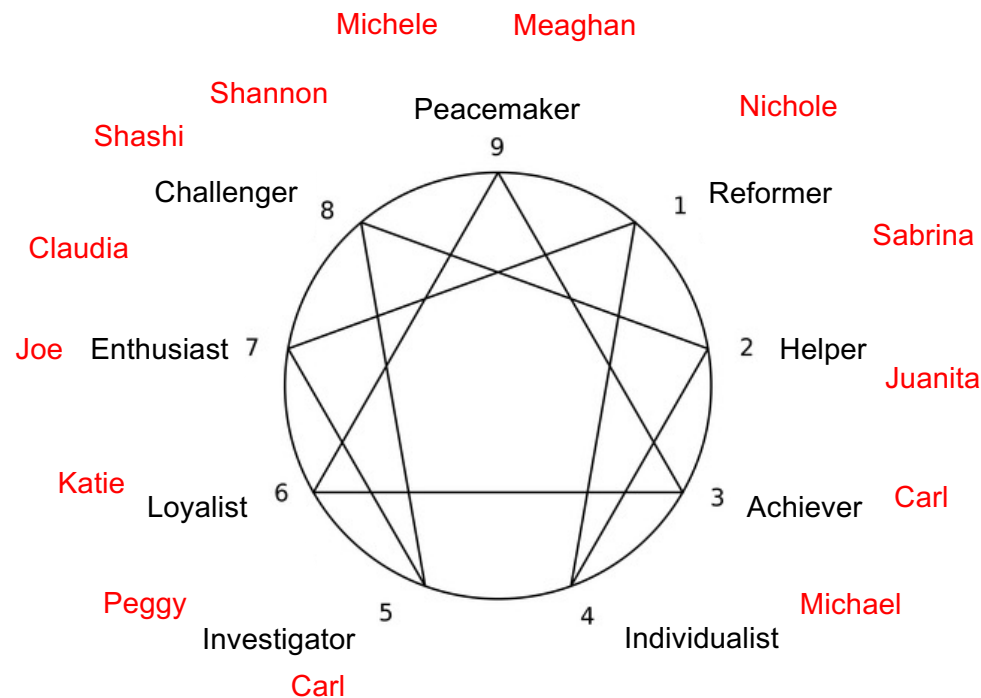
DISC



Enneagram



Enneagram – Eastside Audiology



How Much Should You Pay Your Assistant?

- Average is \$20/hr
- USE A BONUS SYSTEM?
- Higher degree = higher pay

How Much Should You Pay Your HIS?

- Average is \$31/hr
- SALARY + COMMISSION
- BC-HIS = Higher Pay

Ensuring That Excellent Patient Care Is Maintained

- Hire The Right Person
- A Clear Understanding Of Job Functions
 - Essential Job Functions Worksheet
 - Best Practices Protocols
- An Understanding Of Business Goals
 - What Services Are Free?
 - What Warranties Are Provided?
 - How Often Should Patients Be Seen?



- Constant Training
- Consistent Training

Training is Available

- Audiology Academy
 - CUSTOMER SERVICE TRAINING
 - LAB MANAGEMENT TRAINING
 - AUDIOLOGY BASICS TRAINING
- NOVA SOUTHEASTERN
 - LAB TRAINING
 - DIDACTIC TRAINING

Training is Available

- International Hearing Society
 - HEARING TESTING
 - IMPRESSION TAKING
 - HEARING AID AND PROGRAMMING
 - AUDIOLOGY BASICS TRAINING

Create Your Training

I. Basic Audiometric Testing

Air & Bone Conduction Testing

- Calibrate and set up audiometer according to manufacturer specifications, ensuring proper function before patient use.
- Perform otoscopy before testing to check for cerumen impaction, foreign objects, or abnormalities.
- Conduct air conduction testing using headphones or inserts, ensuring correct placement and patient comfort.
- Conduct bone conduction testing using the bone oscillator, properly positioning it on the mastoid while applying appropriate masking techniques.
- Interpret audiogram results accurately, recognizing different types of hearing loss and identifying cases requiring referral to an audiologist or ENT.
- **Example Training Activity:** Conduct air and bone conduction testing on a colleague or test patient, followed by trainer review and feedback.

Speech Audiometry

- Administer speech recognition threshold (SRT) testing using standardized word lists and correct intensity levels.
- Conduct word recognition testing in both quiet and noisy environments to assess speech discrimination ability.
- Explain speech audiometry results to patients in a clear and understandable manner, highlighting potential communication difficulties.
- **Example Training Activity:** Practice administering speech audiometry on multiple patients with different hearing profiles and document results.

Create Your Training

I. Basic Audiometric Testing

Tympanometry & Acoustic Reflexes

- Perform tympanometry using an immittance bridge to assess middle ear function and detect possible conditions like otitis media or Eustachian tube dysfunction.
- Interpret tympanogram results, distinguishing between normal, negative pressure, and flat tympanograms.
- Conduct acoustic reflex testing (if required by state regulations) to assess the integrity of the auditory pathway.
- **Example Training Activity:** Conduct tympanometry on a colleague, compare findings with case studies, and discuss interpretation with the trainer.

II. Hearing Aid Fitting & Programming

Hearing Aid Selection & Consultation

- Identify patient needs based on audiogram results, lifestyle, and communication goals.
- Recommend appropriate hearing aid styles (BTE, RIC, ITE, etc.) and technology levels based on patient preferences and budget.
- Explain benefits and limitations of different hearing aids, including features like noise reduction, directional microphones, and Bluetooth connectivity.
- **Example Training Activity:** Conduct a mock consultation where the trainee recommends hearing aids based on patient case studies.

✓ Training

Create Your Training

Earmold & Impression Taking

- Conduct otoscopy before taking an impression to check for contraindications (e.g., perforation, excessive cerumen).
- Properly insert oto-block to protect the eardrum and ensure a deep impression.
- Mix and inject impression material correctly, avoiding air pockets and distortion.
- Inspect impression for accuracy, ensuring full canal and concha coverage.
- **Example Training Activity:** Take earmold impressions on a practice model or colleague, followed by trainer feedback.

Hearing Aid Programming

- Connect and program hearing aids using manufacturer software and Noah system.
- Perform real-ear measurements (REM) to verify that prescribed amplification targets are met.
- Adjust gain, compression, and frequency response settings to optimize patient comfort and audibility.
- Save and document programming settings in patient records for future reference.
- **Example Training Activity:** Program a hearing aid for a test patient, perform REM, and discuss findings with the trainer.

Patient Counseling on Hearing Aid Use

- Demonstrate proper insertion and removal of hearing aids, ensuring a comfortable fit.
- Educate on battery replacement (disposable or rechargeable) and expected battery life.
- Teach basic troubleshooting, including wax removal, cleaning techniques, and volume adjustments.
- Explain the acclimatization process, realistic expectations, and strategies for adjusting to amplification.
- **Example Training Activity:** Conduct a patient education session, role-playing common patient concerns and questions.



Create Your Training

III. Hearing Aid Maintenance & Troubleshooting

Routine Maintenance Procedures

Troubleshooting Common Issues

IV. Patient Interaction & Office Procedures

Patient Intake & Documentation

Insurance & Billing Basics

Ethical & Legal Considerations

V. Final Evaluation & Competency Check

Hands-On Skill Assessment

- Conduct a full hearing evaluation independently, including otoscopy, audiometry, and speech testing.
- Successfully take an earmold impression without causing discomfort or distortion.
- Program and verify a hearing aid fitting, ensuring the patient's amplification needs are met.
- Effectively counsel a patient on hearing aid use, maintenance, and troubleshooting.
- **Example Training Activity:** Conduct a complete patient appointment from evaluation to fitting with trainer observation.

Trainer's Final Approval

Trainee has demonstrated competency in all required skills:

Why Should You Supervise Training?

Don't miss the most important part of your Plan!



“ I don't have time to supervise training.”



“ What if I train them well and then they leave?”



“ I have trained staff without a plan in the past
and it worked out just fine.”

How to Successfully Train an Audiology Extender

- SET TIME ON THE SCHEDULE FOR FOCUSED TRAINING
 - 30 minutes in the morning 3-5 days a week in weeks 1-4
 - 30 minutes 2 days a week from weeks 5-8
 - 30 minutes a week for weeks 8-10
- SET TIME ON THE SCHEDULE FOR HOMEWORK ASSIGNMENTS TO BE COMPLETED
 - Look ahead to plan ahead
 - Make allowances for other staff to help with homework
- LENGTHEN APPOINTMENTS TO ALLOW FOR TEACHING
 - Hearing aid delivery
 - Hearing assistance technology
 - Phone apps/phone pairing

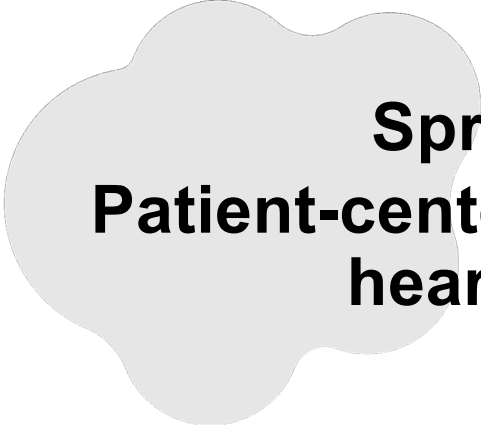
Make a Plan and Find Success





Business Growth
Strategies with
Hearing Instrument
Specialists

If we all pull together
in the same direction,
it's better for all of us.



**Spread the word:
Patient-centered team approach to
hearing healthcare**

Discussion & Questions

Thank you!



Kristin@DavisAudiology.com

864.655.8300

WWW.DAVISAUDIOLOGY.COM

DrKingham@AudiologyAcademy.com

360.436.6376

WWW.AUDIOLOGYACADEMY.COM



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