

From the Editor...

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Evidence-Based Practice (EBP) Briefs represents the outcome of an innovative venture supported by AGS, which is now part of Pearson Assessments. EBP Briefs comes at an exciting time in our profession. As speech-language pathologists and clinical professionals in allied professions are well aware, there is currently a strong emphasis on the importance of critically examining the best available current scientific evidence and integrating this evidence with other types of data to arrive at the best solutions to clinical questions. In this regard, clinical professionals are being asked to bridge the “research to practice gap” by conducting reviews of the empirical literature in search of objective answers to questions they face in the field. After their reviews are complete, they are expected to incorporate their findings into their decision-making frameworks to result in clinical decisions that are informed by the best available empirical evidence. This movement in speech-language pathology is not occurring in a vacuum; rather, it reflects a more general paradigm shift toward greater accountability in the medical, allied health, and educational disciplines in which professionals are expected to consult the scientific evidence in their everyday decision making to ensure that theory and craft are balanced with data and evidence.

Evidence-based practice (EBP) refers to the process that clinical professionals go through as they consult various sources of information to answer a clinical question. In this process, the scientific literature is but one source consulted, but the tenets of EBP position this literature to be just as relevant as other information sources that are typically consulted (e.g., clinical experience, theoretical perspective). The clinician engaged in the process of EBP arrives at an answer to a clinical question that integrates information from an array of inputs, to include not only the scientific literature but also client preferences, institutional norms and policies, and his/her theoretical knowledge and clinical experiences.

For clinical professionals to engage in the process of EBP, they must have access not only to high-quality research studies relevant to the clinical questions they ask, but also to systematic reviews of particular bodies of evidence that attempt to find objective answers to commonly asked questions. EBP Briefs is designed to support evidence-minded professionals by identifying and answering clinically relevant questions using current standards of evidence-based practice, with a focus on examining evidence relevant to pressing questions in school-based practice. For the most part, each brief considers a specific question, evaluates the available scientific evidence relevant to the question, and makes recommendations for integrating this scientific evidence into clinical decision making. My intention as the editor of EBP Briefs is to provide clinical professionals with a useful resource that they may draw upon as they strive to provide the most effective services possible to children, adolescents, and adults who exhibit impaired communication abilities.

In this inaugural issue of EBP Briefs, experts from the field of communication sciences and disorders address a variety of important issues with which clinical professionals are concerned. These briefs rigorously evaluate the available evidence concerning the contexts of language intervention in school settings (McGinty and Justice), the use of sign language for children with autism (Schwartz and Nye), the facilitation of vocabulary skills using storybooks (Johnson and Yeates), the design of social skills interventions for adolescents (Burgess and Turkstra), the treatment of moderate to severe speech-sound disorders (Gillam and Kamhi), and the use of systematic reviews for informing cognitive rehabilitation intervention (Kennedy). In addition to answering a number of specific clinical questions, the process these authors model as they seek answers to their questions will undoubtedly be informative to clinical professionals who have their own questions to ask and who want to adopt an evidence-based framework. I am certain that speech-language pathologists and other clinical professionals will find that these reviews provide useful and timely guidance for their evidence-based decision-making process.

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