



Member Documentation

Professional Guidance for Hearing Care Assistants

A Guide to Best Practise

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Introduction



The British Society of Hearing Aid Audiologists (BSHAA) is the professional body which represents amongst others, Hearing Aid Dispensers (HADs) who are registered with the Health & Care Professions Council (HCPC).

A Hearing Care Assistant (HCA) is an assistant to a HAD. BSHAA has updated its definition of the Hearing Care Assistant (HCA) role as part of the wider hearing care team.

For further advice or information, please contact:



BSHAA: membership@bshaa.org

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1. Aim

The primary aim of the development of the Hearing Care Assistant role has been:

- to enhance client access to hearing care services by adding capacity to the hearing care team
- to enable clients with more complex needs to be given greater attention by a HAD
- to provide clients and carers with more time to discuss the practical aspects of their care needs
- to develop a career pathway which will support progression into the Hearing Aid Dispenser profession
- to facilitate sustained capacity and quality of service to meet the increasing demands for hearing care from an ageing population
- to improve standards of client aftercare by creating a skilled support workforce.

2. Hearing Care Assistant Guidance Background

This guidance reflects best practice building on the Code of Conduct and Training Standards for Healthcare Support Workers and Adult Social Care Workers in England. It provides a framework for BSHAA members to use to develop Hearing Care Assistant roles within their practices.

<https://www.skillsforcare.org.uk/resources/documents/Support-for-leaders-and-managers/Managing-people/Code-of-conduct/Code-of-Conduct.pdf>

This Guide describes the HCA role in terms of:

- tasks which could be undertaken by a HCA
- the potential of a HCA role along the Hearing Aid Client Pathway
- training programmes
- responsibilities of BSHAA, the employer, the HAD and the HCA
- recommendations for supporting HCAs in practice.

3. Hearing Care Assistant Role

Role Description

A Hearing Care Assistant (HCA) is described as someone who:

- is a care worker who has the attitudes, skills, and knowledge to provide a range of agreed tasks and activities to provide safe and effective hearing care support to the Hearing Aid Dispenser (HAD) within defined levels of supervision (direct and remote)
- has undergone a suitable training programme
- is supervised by and working with a HAD in their day-to-day work
- A Hearing Care Assistant should always refer to themselves as such (or as 'HCA'). No other descriptor terminology should be used.

Key Tasks and Activities

HCAs support HADs in the preliminary assessment, fitting and follow-up stages of the Hearing Care Client Pathway. The central focus of their work is to support and enhance the services provided by their supervising HAD to clients, their relatives and carers.

After the successful completion of a training programme the HCA will be able to provide the HAD and their service with:

- effective communication with clients and their relatives or carers
- the provision of general information to clients about currently available hearing aid systems and the professional services associated with their supply
- accurate recording of client information contributing to a case history
- the performance of otoscopy in accordance with current British Society of Audiology (BSA) recommended procedures. <http://www.thebsa.org.uk/resources/>
- advise clients on ear wax management
- recording of pure tone audiometry, without masking, in accordance with current BSA recommended procedures <http://www.thebsa.org.uk/resources/>
- taking aural impressions in accordance with current BSA recommended procedures for the provision of ear moulds or other custom-made devices and ear fittings <http://www.thebsa.org.uk/resources/>

3. Hearing Care Assistant Role (Cont.)

- assistance for HADs in the fitting of hearing aid systems (including subjective and objective evaluation of aid performance and effectiveness, and teaching the client how to fit, use and care for hearing aids) as set out by the HAD in the management and rehabilitation plan agreed with the client.
- Carrying out ear wax removal under supervision of their HAD
- the provision of information and advice to clients regarding rehabilitation as determined by the HAD
- advice and provision of assistive technologies to clients
- the provision of appropriate post-fitting aftercare services
- the recognition of where there is the need for advice and management from the HAD
- the ability to work co-operatively with other professionals in health and social care in the management of care plans for individual clients.

Hearing Care Assistants may perform some or all of the above in a variety of locations as directed by and under defined levels of HAD supervision. The HAD is responsible for undertaking an assessment of risk when assigning tasks, considering the abilities and scope of the HCA and the needs of the client.

Limitations: HCAs should always be mindful to work within their scope of practice. Whilst it is accepted that this scope may develop with experience, clients must always be referred onwards to a relevant professional where necessary (an example maybe more complex diagnostic testing needs).



4. The Protected Function of the HAD

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“Hearing Aid Dispensers have a protected function. Only a Hearing Aid Dispenser registered with the HCPC may:

- assess or test a person’s hearing; or
- prescribe a hearing aid for a person

where the HAD or any other person intends to supply or provide a hearing aid by way of retail, sale or hire.

It is therefore a criminal offence for someone who is not HCPC registered as a hearing aid dispenser to assess or test a person’s hearing, even if the individual does not prescribe a hearing aid. Equally, it is a criminal offence for someone who is not HCPC registered as a hearing aid dispenser to prescribe a hearing aid, even if the individual does not assess or test a person’s hearing. Both offences only relate to where the hearing aid is supplied by retail sale or hire.

Only someone registered as a hearing aid dispenser may perform these controlled acts. Any individual not registered with the HCPC as a hearing aid dispenser, even if they are registered in another profession, would be committing a criminal act if they perform them.”

www.hcpc-uk.org

The supervising HAD must prescribe each hearing aid (i.e., takes full responsibility for the selection and recommendation). Every single prescription recommended should be recorded as such. A HAD must be involved by name in every retail sale of hearing aids.

5. Employing Hearing Care Assistants

When employing support workers to carry out some or all of the tasks identified above, an employer must ensure the support worker has undergone the appropriate training. The HCA role, in some cases, might be only a part of an individual's job description – this is for the employer to determine. Where some or all of the HCA role is part of that job, then the necessary HCA training must be completed.

6. Supervising Hearing Care Assistants

Like all care staff, HCAs are responsible for their own practice and conduct. They will, however, always work under the supervision of a designated HAD who, as the HCPC registered professional, will retain the ultimate responsibility and accountability for the clinical and rehabilitative management of the client.

<https://www.hcpc-uk.org/globalassets/resources/standards/standards-of-conduct-performance-and-ethics.pdf>

Once an HCA has passed a training programme there may be circumstances when the supervising HAD is not physically present but they will always be readily available for consultation via remote supervision.

The supervising HAD will provide clinical and other professional guidance as appropriate. As the relationship develops between HCA and HAD and the HCA gains experience and confidence, close supervision may reduce but the HAD will always remain in overall control of the clinical care to the clients.

Any HCPC registered HAD can be the named supervisor for a fully trained HCA, although it is recommended that newly qualified HADs have a period (1 year) to consolidate their own practice before taking on this responsibility.

HADs under HCPC caution, interim suspension, interim conditions of practice, suspension – should not supervise HCAs.

The Society uses the term supervision to refer to a practitioner who may work autonomously but has the support of clinical and/or professional supervision of a HCPC registered HAD or a person holding an officially recognised audiological qualification.

6. Supervising Hearing Care Assistants (Cont.)

The Society accepts that the frequency of ongoing supervision will change as experience increases. Therefore, no set requirements are laid out but as an example, the Society would expect a “glide path” typically ranging from weekly in the first month immediately following qualification through to quarterly for those with around 12 -18 months of experience, and that those HCAs with 2+ years’ experience can function fully autonomously but with supervision still available as and when needed.

The supervisee is required at all times to keep a record of dates and learning outcomes as a result of supervision and the Society may request to see these records.

The Society has adopted key points from the HCPC’s key characteristics of effective supervision to assist members:

- Supervision should focus on sharing and enhancing knowledge and skills to support professional development and improve service delivery
- Supervision should be regular and based on the needs of the individual, and ad hoc supervision should be available when needed or requested
- Supervisory models should be based on the needs of the individual, such as one-to-one, group, internal, external or distance.

7. BSHAA Membership

Student membership

All students enrolled on a HCA training programme can sign up for BSHAA student membership. This allows students to access a range of resources on the BSHAA website, membership benefits and gain experience of being part of the hearing care professional community.

HCA membership

On successful completion of a Training Programme, HCAs will have the opportunity to transfer their student membership to that of an associate member.

Continuing Membership requirements:

All HCAs whose primary duties are within audiology and have supervision are required to log their supervision sessions, reflectively through the CPD Portal.

8. HCA Competency Review

HCAs are required to demonstrate their continued development in knowledge and competence every two years. This can be done by recording entries on the BSHAA CPD Portal.

It is hoped that employers will see this as a shared responsibility and will provide development opportunities for the HCAs in their employment.

As part of the review, the supervising HAD will be required to make a declaration in support of the HCA's continued competence and standard of practice.

9. What if there is a problem?

As a professional body, BSHAA has a role to support its members and promote the profession. There are instances when a member may wish to seek BSHAA advice or support. The following examples are provided as such and do not signify the necessity of involving BSHAA or the limits of BSHAA involvement in any one case.

Tasks Outside the HCA Role

If an HCA is concerned that they are being asked to undertake tasks which sit outside the BSHAA HCA role and/or are not in line with the Hearing Aid Client Pathway, they should first approach their registered HAD using this Guide as a basis for discussion. Further reference documents setting out the responsibilities of HADs in assigning tasks can be found on the BSHAA website.

If this does not resolve the problem, the HCA could take matters further. If the HAD supervising them is not their direct employer, then a discussion with company management may prove useful.

If the matter persists, HCA Members of BSHAA can contact BSHAA directly for guidance and support.

HCA Competence

If the on-going competence of the HCA is a concern, it is the responsibility of the supervising HAD/employer to address and resolve the area of concern, in order for the individual to continue in the HCA role. A period of closer supervision may be required or additional training.

HADs can use this BSHAA HCA role description and the Hearing Aid Client Pathway plus the National Standards as an objective measure of performance to enable the area of concern to be described and named, so that appropriate action might be taken.

Any competence issues must be addressed as soon as they are identified. Such issues must not be left until the point of renewal of the HCA membership, when the supervising HAD might not feel able to make their declaration.

Support for Students in Training

The responsibility for supporting a student in training is shared between the training provider and the employer. As part of BSHAA's requirements, training providers are asked to outline their procedures to support students in all aspects of the training.

If the training provider or the employer does not meet the BSHAA standards required during their training, then the student, as a BSHAA student member, will be able to seek advice and, if required, assistance from BSHAA.

9. What if there is a problem? (Cont.)

Supervising HAD does not provide adequate supervision

Failure to adequately supervise could put HADs at risk of breaching Standard 8 in the HCPC Standards of Conduct Performance and Ethics, the responsibility for tasks delegated to others.

Concerns about the adequacy of supervision of an HCA should be referred to BSHAA, which will investigate further.



10. Roles and Responsibilities

The following section summarises the roles and responsibilities expected of individuals and organisations to enable the HCA to deliver safe, high-quality care to clients, supporting the practice of their supervising HAD.

For clarity, the employer and HAD responsibilities have been separated below, with the understanding that for employers in small businesses, one person is likely to fulfil both roles.

Role of BSHAA

- Regularly review the HCA role and associated training requirements to ensure compliance with with best practice
- Provide opportunities for HCAs, HADs and employers to keep up to date with legislative, policy and practice developments
- Maintain the list of member HCAs by operating a robust process for membership renewal
- Manage the training programme process within the standards and timelines set.

Employer

- Enable and encourage the HCA to access development opportunities to maintain their role
- Support the supervising HAD in practice
- Set up processes to monitor and report the on-going competence of the HCA to support the renewal process
- Ensure industry standards for approved training are in place.

Hearing Aid Dispenser

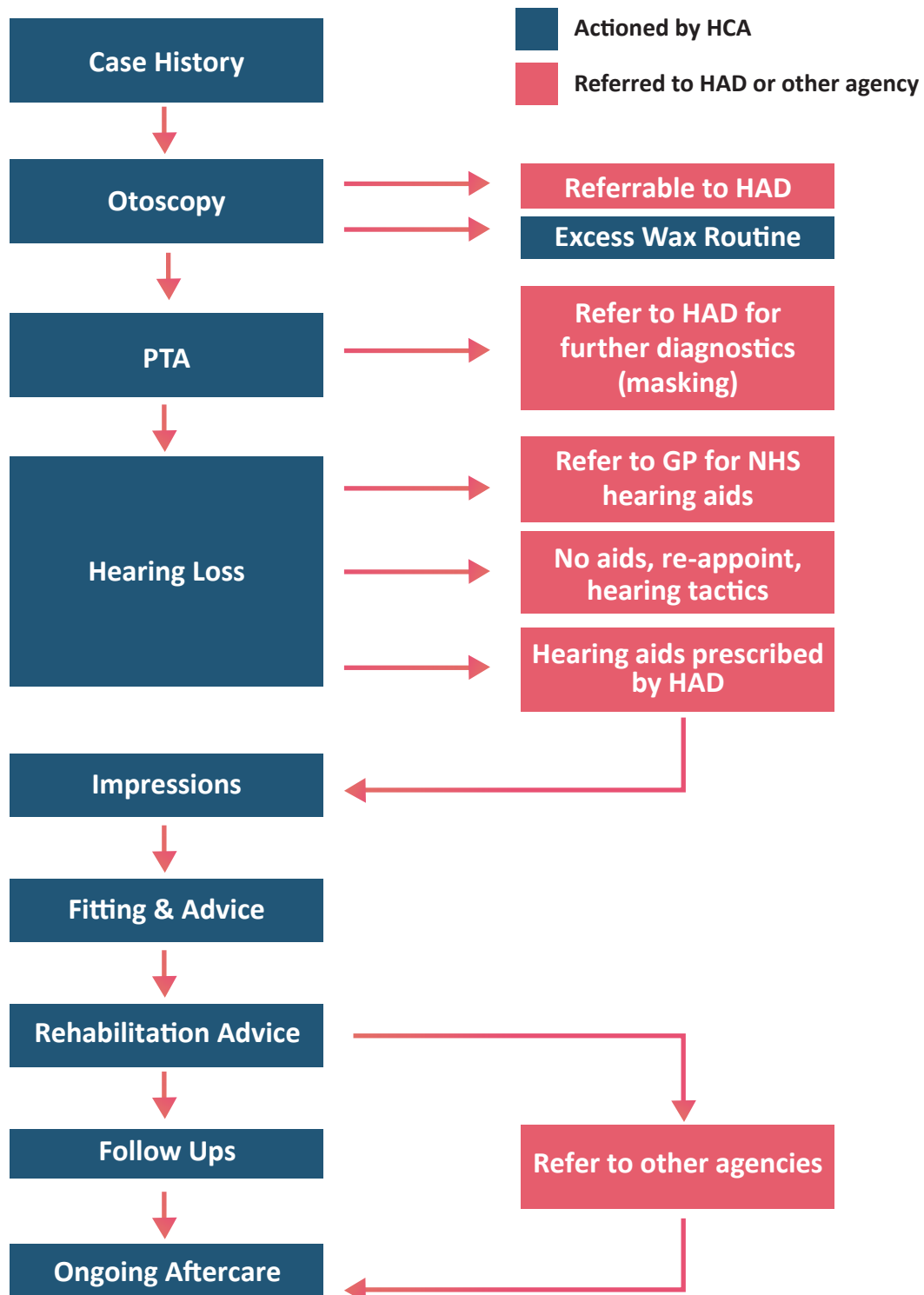
- Only delegate tasks for which you know the HCA is competent
- Act always within the HCPC code of conduct.
- Monitor and support the HCA to keep updated and provide opportunities for development
- Actively assess on-going competence and, where necessary, take action to remedy areas of concern.

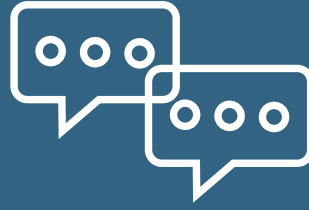
10. Roles and Responsibilities (Cont.)

Hearing Care Assistant

- Be accountable by making sure you can answer for your actions or omissions
- Promote and uphold the privacy, dignity and rights of people who use your services
- Work in collaboration with colleagues to provide high quality hearing care, knowing when to seek help/advice from an HAD
- Take personal responsibility for keeping up to date and be able to demonstrate continuing development.

HCA Client Pathway (BSHAA 2023)





Queries & Questions

BSHAA has taken all reasonable steps to ensure that the information in this guide is accurate and up to date.

BSHAA does not accept any liability for any errors or omissions, or for how it might be interpreted or used.

The Society welcomes comments on this document or if you have any questions or queries, please contact us through:



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