



Webwords 3

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Institutions, associations, consumers and the net

Institutions

An institution is a system of relations or an organisation that is infused with value and recognised as part of the way of doing things. The British Monarchy (<http://www.royal.gov.uk/family/index.htm>) is an institution, so are yum cha (<http://www.foodwine.com/destinations/hongkong/hkteatime.html>), chopped liver (<http://www.ohr.org.il/judaism/cartoons/cartoons.htm>), mateship, the ANZAC legend and the great Aussie long weekend (<http://www.holidayfestival.com/Australia.html>). Institutions sometimes acquire venerability with time. They are gradually invested with special meaning as they prove their staying power and become traditions. The British Medical Association (<http://web.bma.org.uk/homepage.nsf>) and its journal (<http://www.bmj.com/>), like the weekly international science journal *Nature* (<http://www.nature.com/>) have become honoured and at times controversial institutions.

Associations

For their members at least, professional associations acquire institutional status through their standards, procedures, traditions and public profile. In recent times, new dimensions have been added to the notion of "public profile" with the opportunity for professionals to be represented by a "web presence". Most Australian medical and paramedical bodies have national web sites that tell people, including consumers of their services, what they are about. An exception is the Australian Association of Occupational Therapists, but its New South Wales branch more than makes up for the lack of a national page with its informative homepage (<http://www.ozemail.com.au/~aaotnsw/>).

Australian Dental Association

<http://www.ada.org.au/>

Australian Medical Association

<http://www.ama.com.au/>

Australian Nursing Federation

<http://www.anf.org.au/>

Australian Psychological Society

<http://www.cpa.ca/aps/www.bhs.mq.edu.au/aps/>

Australian Physiotherapy Association

<http://www.physiotherapy.asn.au/>

Australian Association of Social Workers

<http://www.aasw.asn.au/>

Optometrists' Association Australia

<http://www.optometrists.asn.au/~oanats/oa.htm>

Pharmacy Guild of Australia

<http://www.guild.org.au/>

Speech Pathology Australia

<http://avoca.vicnet.net.au/~sppathau/>

Professional association websites have two main groups of consumers: association members, including students, and consumers of the members' services. In the case of speech pathologists, the consumers are clients and those close to them.



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Consumers and the Net

It would appear that countless speech pathology consumers are skilled in the art of seeking out information for themselves. They often use general search engines: AltaVista (<http://www.altavista.com/>), WebCrawler (<http://www.webcrawler.com/>) and Lycos (<http://www.lycos.com/>), for example, or directories like Yahoo (<http://www.yahoo.com/>) and AOL (<http://www.aol.com/netfind/>). Other consumers turn first to specialist search sites like

ERIC (<http://www.accesseric.org/>). ERIC is an acronym for the Educational Resources Information Center, a federally funded national information system in the US providing a broad range of education-related services. It is linked to the National Library of Education (<http://www.ed.gov/NLE/>) and the US Department of Education (<http://www.ed.gov/>). Searches of these resources can lead to interesting sites like the list of psychology-related electronic journals, conference proceedings at <http://psych.hanover.edu/Krantz/journal.html> or PubMed (<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/PubMed/>). PubMed is the National Library of Medicine's search service that accesses the 9 million citations in MEDLINE and Pre-MEDLINE (with links to participating on-line journals), and related databases like Loansome Doc (<http://tendon.nlm.nih.gov/ld/loansome.html>), Grateful Med (<http://igm.nlm.nih.gov/>), and a sanity-saving citation matcher (<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/PubMed/wgetcit.html>) for single journal articles. Meanwhile, specific topics are explored in depth at sites like Peter Flipsen Jr's Craniofacial Anomalies links (<http://cahn.mankato.msus.edu/flipcraniolinks.html>), John Faughnan's developmental dyspraxia citations (<http://www.labmed.um.edu/~john/apraxiarefs.html#Title>), or the Asha Treatment Efficacy Bibliography (<http://www.asha.org/professionals/NCTECD/efficacy/index.htm>).

The net provides a range of options that can be utilised with the aid of search tools. Consumers can use the medium's interactive elements to navigate their own course, through available content and resources, to locate material that best satisfies their needs and interests. The people behind the ASHA and CASLPA sites provide copious leads to other sites.

What does the Speech Pathology Australia website have to offer its consumers? Well, for professional visitors there is helpful information about the assessment of speech pathology qualifications obtained outside Australia, our annual conference, educational institutions (with eight

external hyperlinks to the relevant university departments), five more external hyperlinks, this time to ASHA, CASLPA, NZSTA, RCSLT and GASP, membership application forms, an online national employment register, private practitioner association details, a state-by-state professional development calendar, and details of the Association's publications. There are a series of fact sheets with titles including What is a speech pathologist?, Who has a communication disability?, What is a communication disability?, as well as fact sheets focusing on children's speech, language and literacy development, and communication problems follow-

ing a stroke. These fact sheets are written in non-technical language so as to be easily understood by non-speech pathologists, but they are also available for members to use as handouts or as part of a media release.

Institutionalised member apathy and inactivity is characteristic of organisations in general, from school parent and citizen bodies, to sporting clubs and political parties. How often do we hear that the burden of work in such-and-such an association is carried by the unthanked but hard-working few? Speech Pathology Australia thrives because we have relatively few difficulties in that area. From where I

sit I see many talented, willing and energetic participants making the Association 'work' for us all. Pam Snow is one case in point, with three creditable issues of the reinvigorated ACQ to her (and our) credit. And we have active branch and task group participation in the newly convened Web Site Review Team that monitors our website and provides comments, feedback and recommendations to the Association on a quarterly basis. Feedback from members is welcome about any Association service or product, including the website, and can be emailed to National Office at sppathau@vicnet.net.au.

Fact sheets

Speech Pathology Australia has a range of fact sheets that can be accessed via the website at <http://www.vicnet.net.au/~sppathau>. These fact sheets can be copied and handed out at displays or to your clients, you can attach them to a media release or use the information they contain to help prepare your media story.

Each member received a copy of these fact sheets as they have been produced over the past few years. To refresh your memory the titles are:

- 1.1 What is Speech Pathology?
- 1.2 Who has a Communication Disability?
- 1.3 What is a Communication Disability?
- 1.4 What is it like to have a Communication Disability?
- 1.5 What are the costs of Communication Disability?
- 2.1 Helping your baby to talk
- 2.2 Learning to speak and listen – what to expect in the first five years
- 2.3 The Sound of Speech – the ages and stages of children's speech
- 3.1 Communication problems following stroke
- 3.2 Literacy development
- 3.3 Communication and the older person