

Episode 57: A Day in the Life of a Medical SLP: Conversation with a Private Practice Cog-Comm SLP

Meet Katie Brown, a speech-language pathologist and certified brain injury specialist who started her own private practice after just three years of being in the medical SLP field. In the latest episode of The Missing Link, Katie walks listeners through her journey to opening her private practice, discusses some of her favorite resources, offers advice to students and clinical fellows just starting out, and much more.

Discussion & Reflection Questions

1. Can you tell us a little bit about why you became a speech-language pathologist? What's your story?
2. Where do you work now and what does a typical day look like for you? Do you have a brick-and-mortar building, or are you all virtual?
3. How long after your clinical fellow did you branch off into your private practice? And how many years have you been practicing?
4. You are a mentor in the Start Your Private Practice program. How did you get into that?
5. What are some of your favorite SLP resources?
6. How do you find time to balance all of the responsibilities and passions you have?
7. What can you tell the new speech pathologist about ethical settings?
8. Any words of advice for the graduate student or clinical fellow who may want to follow in your footsteps?

Quote of the Conversation

"I think my words of wisdom would be to bet on yourself. Put the work in. Do what you want to do. That's what I did with my private practice. I bet on myself, and it was one of the scariest things that I've ever done. And I'm feeling more fulfilled personally and professionally than I ever have."

-Katie Brown, MA, CCC-SLP, CBIS

Katie Brown, MA, CCC-SLP, CBIS

Speech-Language Pathologist and Owner of Neuro Speech Solutions



Katie Brown, MA, CCC-SLP, CBIS is a speech-language pathologist and certified brain injury specialist practicing in Buffalo, NY. She owns a private practice called Neuro Speech Solutions which specializes in therapy for adults with neurogenic communication and cognitive disorders. Katie is passionate about providing meaningful, functional therapy to those with

aphasia and cognitive impairments related to stroke and TBI.

Outside of her private practice, Katie is active in the SLP community. She is an advocate for person-centered care and creates digital materials aiming to help other medical SLPs feel more confident in providing personally relevant therapy. Katie is a mentor for the Start Your Private Practice Program and an SLP consultant for the aphasia app company, Tactus Therapy. She volunteers for several non-profits and provides a monthly workshop for brain injury survivors.

In her free time, Katie enjoys spending time with her husband, two sons, and dog. She is an amateur baker, lover of local coffee, and outdoor enthusiast

Keep the Conversation Going

Katie Brown, MA, CCC-SLP, CBIS

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Thank you for listening to *The Missing Link for SLPs* podcast! **If you enjoyed the show, I'd love you to subscribe, rate it and leave a short review.** Also, please share an episode with a friend. Together we can raise awareness and help more SLPs find and connect those missing links to help them feel confident in their patient care every step of the way.

Follow me on Instagram, join the Fresh SLP community on Facebook or learn more at FreshSLP.com. Let's make those connections. You got this!

Do you have a question you'd like answered on the show?

Interested in sharing your experience as an SLP with our audience?

Send a message to Mattie@FreshSLP.com!

Not a substitute for a formal SLP education or medical advice for patients/caregivers

"When you're the speech therapist, people like to talk to you. And they like to tell you their life stories, and they tell you their secrets. And they depend on you, and they share stuff with you. And that is really fun. I love learning about people's lives. And they're so fascinating."

Mattie Murrey

I know a lot of you listeners out there are brand new to the field and wondering, "Where can I go? What can I do with my career." This next guest is just super impressive as is, everybody. This is Katie Brown. She is a CBIS speech pathologist, which means she's a certified brain injury specialist practicing in Buffalo, New York. She owns her own private practice called Neuro Speech Solutions and specializes in therapy for adults with neurogenic communication and cognitive disorders. And Katie is very passionate about providing meaningful function therapy to those with aphasia and cognitive impairments related to stroke and TBI. And it gets better. Outside of her private practice, Katie is active in the SLP community. She's an advocate for person-centered care and creates digital materials aimed to help other medical SLPs feel more competent in providing personally relevant therapy. This means functional therapy that actually makes a difference in patients' lives. Katie is a mentor for the Start Your Private Practice program and is an SLP consultant for the aphasia app company Tactus Therapy. And if you know anything about anything, Tactus Therapy is one of the leading app companies out there that has great, great, great resources. Katie volunteers for several nonprofits and provides a monthly workshop for brain injury survivors. In her free time, Katie enjoys spending time with her husband's two sons and a dog. She's an amateur baker, lover of local coffee, and an outdoor enthusiast. So, I tell you, if I could write a description for myself, that would be it.

Mattie Murrey

Hello, and welcome to The Missing Link for SLPs podcast. I am so glad you are here. Today's episode is part of the Medical SLP series, where we talk to some amazing speech paths who work in a variety of medical settings, all the way from intensive care through to home care, and everything else in between and beyond. You're going to hear some incredible medical SLP stories and lots of advice from these passionate medical SLPs.

Mattie Murrey

Welcome, Katie. Very impressive bio that I just read about you. You are real, and so many students and new speech paths are going to want to hear how you've developed your career. Welcome to the program.

Katie Brown

Thank you. Thank you so much for having me on.

Mattie Murrey

Can you tell us a little bit about why you became a speech pathologist? What's your story?

Katie Brown

Yeah, of course. So, I became a speech pathologist for several different reasons, all having to do with my grandparents. So, I know the classic SLP origin story is, "I had speech when I was a kid," or, "My family member had speech when I was younger." Mine actually started when my grandfather had a stroke. And he had a stroke, and he had global aphasia. The only thing that



he could say was, "Wait a week." And he would say that with normal prosody. He would say, "Wait a week, wait a week, wait a week," like he was having a conversation with you. And I thought it was one of the most fascinating things. And at the time, I was going to school to be a... Well, my major was linguistics. And you know, I was already kind of thinking, "What am I going to do with linguistics?" I'd always been fascinated by communication and language. So, that's what really drew me to it. But then, I think the catalyst was my grandfather having a stroke, and aphasia was the result. It's something that I had never heard of before. So, I took a class the next semester in cognitive sciences and communication sciences and disorders, and I loved it. I was hooked. And then, also, follow-up to that: My other grandfather ended up having dementia. And watching that progression — from being completely independent to going into an assisted-living [facility] to ending up going to long-term care, and just the skills that he lost during that time — was also something that was very near and dear to me, to watch him go through that, and also, just how best to support him. It was something that I wanted to be able to provide to other caregivers.

Mattie Murrey

Did you know from undergraduate school that you wanted to go into the medical SLP side?

Katie Brown

Absolutely. I love children. I have two kids. But I always said that I don't want to work with kids because I want to have patience for my own children when I come. And I also just felt like... Medical speech pathology is so diverse. In everything that you see, it's completely different from one case to the next. Your days are very different. It's not working on "R," and then working on "K" and "G," and then working on "S." So, it works for me because it really keeps me on my toes. It always keeps me thinking. And there's so much to learn in medical speech pathology, too.

Mattie Murrey

And it's a career that just can shift [and] evolve throughout your career time [and] career span. Where I started is not where I am now. And it sounds like, even though you've been medically SLP-based, you just have such a wide variety of experience. Tell us, where do you work now and how does your typical day work out?

Katie Brown

Sure, of course. So, right now, I own my own private practice in Buffalo, New York called Neuro Speech Solutions. So, my private practice is specialized in focusing on working with adults with neurogenic communication and cognitive disorders. My main focuses are on aphasia and cognitive communication deficits, specifically post-stroke or TBI. However, I do also see individuals with Parkinson's disease and dementia. I do see people with dysphasia — a lot less now that there's COVID. But you know, dysphasia is also an aspect of my business. But really, the focus is on neurogenic communication and cognitive disorders.

Mattie Murrey



So, how long after your clinical fellow did you branch off into your private practice? And how many years have you been practicing?

Katie Brown

Sure. So, I've been practicing for four or five years. I branched off and started my own private practice after only three years of being in the field. So, I would encourage any listener out there that, you know, [for] private practice, you don't need to wait until you have 20-plus years of experience to start your private practice. There are people out there that need you and need your passion and expertise. So, I don't think that being a newer clinician is a deterrent to starting a private practice.

Mattie Murrey

I must say, I'm really surprised. One, you look young, but the bio I read about you... You just sound so... You're very impressive. And to have accomplished that in five years demonstrates that someone with focus and drive can do that.

Katie Brown

Thank you. I appreciate that. You know, I've always been a very hard worker. I have never really been content with relaxing. Well, not that I'm not content with relaxing. But I always want to do more and I always want to learn more, and that's always been my personality type from a very young age. I just want to keep going and learning and impacting. So, that's really driven me throughout my career.

Mattie Murrey

So, as a private-practice speech pathologist, how does your day work?

Katie Brown

You know, I say that I have the best job in the world because I need my job for myself. So, as a private practitioner, I have the luxury of becoming a specialist rather than a generalist, which is a big reason that I started my private practice. So, I have a lot of flexibility and freedom. Like I mentioned earlier, I have two young children. One of them is seven months old. So, he keeps me up late at night. So, I get to start my day when I want to, which is generally 9 a.m. That's a good time for me. So, I work from 9 a.m. until 4 p.m. I see patients at the start of every hour for 45- to 60-minute sessions, whatever is appropriate. And I see a diverse caseload throughout the day.

Mattie Murrey

Do you have a brick-and-mortar building or are you all virtual?

Katie Brown

I do telepractice, but I also see clients in their homes. [I'm] mostly telepractice now, and prior to the pandemic, it was all in their homes. I never thought I would be doing telepractice, but I have



transitioned to some telepractice. And I anticipate that I will have some aspect of telepractice throughout my duration of being a private-practice owner.

Mattie Murrey

So, for those who are questioning, and are getting out of their clinical fellow and thinking of moving into private practice, was there support for you wanting to start your private practice and learning how? I know Jena Castro-Casbon has her private practice — Independent Clinician, I think it's called. How did you get started in that? Are you part of that program as well?

Katie Brown

I am a part of that program. So, I'm actually a mentor for that program. So, I mentor Jena's new students in the Start Your Private Practice program. And that is where I got my start was in that program.

Mattie Murrey

Good to know. Good to know. So, lots of support for speech pathologists when they're ready to begin their private practice. [They] can do that. And then, how did you decide to niche down?

Katie Brown

So, I decided to niche down — one, because it was something that I was incredibly passionate about. You know, aphasia and cognitive communication is just what lights a fire in me. It's what makes me want to sit and watch tons of continuing-education courses and go out and find new and exciting ways to treat these individuals. So, I knew right away that I wanted to niche down to adult neuro. I also knew that my area was in desperate need of a specialist in adult neuro. In my area, we have several large private practices. However, they are generalists. And there are plenty of good generalist SLPs out there, but I also feel like it's very important to be able to find a practitioner that specializes in something within your geographic areas. And that was a lack in my area, which was one of the reasons why I decided to start my private practice: to have a place for those individuals that just had a stroke to go and know that they have a reliable partner in their recovery.

Mattie Murrey

So, for the clinical fellow or the graduate student who is in her program, any words of advice for her or him who might want to follow in your footsteps?

Katie Brown

Of course. So, as far as getting a medical SLP job, that's the first step. You know, don't give up. There is a place for you. Skilled nursing facilities are probably the most common jobs out there on job boards, and you can certainly learn some very valuable skills working in SNFs. You don't need to start out in acute care. You can start out treating all across the spectrum of adults. And you can always apply to your ideal position after your CF if that's your main goal.

Mattie Murrey



Any advice for learning that the new speech pathologist should do [or] focus on?

Katie Brown

Honestly, I think that continually learning is something that we need to do. I don't think that the ASHA standards — the 30 hours every three years — is enough, personally. I think that it should be higher. So, I encourage everyone to learn as much as you can. You know, believe it or not, grad school did not prepare you for everything you will see in health care. Not even close. I know that you probably just spent a whole lot of money on your education, but it's important for you to continuously learn. So, always find reliable resources out there, like Fresh SLP. Read the newest research. Look at other SLPs you work with for advice and find yourself a mentor as well.

Mattie Murrey

You know, you're talking about resources. What are some of your favorite resources?

Katie Brown

Absolutely. So, there are so many resources out there. And I have several that I love and personally use in my clinical day-to-day life. So, the Medical SLP Collective is something that is just absolutely fabulous for anyone that is planning or wants to aspire to be a medical-based SLP. So, [they're] a very large community of speech pathologists across the world, honestly. And they provide weekly resources that are anywhere from research reviews to done-for-you services to different handouts on how to do treatment protocols. Very, very valuable information. And they also provide CEUs every month as well.

Mattie Murrey

And that is a monthly subscription. I don't remember the price for that. I want to say 30-something. I've belonged to that as well, and there's weekly newsletters. There's just everything you could ever want in that group. The one thing that I love about it is... Fresh SLP is for the brand-new clinician, and it's really meant as a bridge until you can get into those bigger groups. Because then, things in there... Some of those programs you just won't find anywhere else. Because passing here will give you your basic trach courses. But then, Medical SLP, The Informed SLP, all of those, they just really give you that deeper dive on some of those really critical thinking courses to work your way through those more complex patients.

Katie Brown

Yes. And you mentioned The Informed SLP. I also subscribe to The Informed SLP. [They're] another wonderful resource for, really, any speech pathologist because they look at the research for all ages — you know, from early intervention, birth, the school age, to adults as well. So, I subscribe to their adult portion.

Mattie Murrey

Mentioned that. That's also a subscription. And it's in three different ranges, right?

Katie Brown



Correct.

Mattie Murrey

Preschool. And then middle school through high school, I think. And then the adult SLP. one. And that's like five bucks a month.

Katie Brown

Yeah. It's fairly cheap. I think I pay quarterly for it. It's a very good resource. I love it. Because, you know, every month I get very digestible bites of research presented to my email that are clinically applicable, which I think is the key part there. They only provide research that you can immediately turn around and use with your patients.

Mattie Murrey

And it takes a little bit of the pressure off of the speech pathologist who's trying to stay up to date on the latest and greatest evidence-based practice.

Katie Brown

Yeah. You will never be able to read all of the research articles that are coming out. So, let someone else do them for you. Some other resources that I love? I love, love, love, love, love Tactus Therapy. I am a consultant for Tactus Therapy, and they're just such a wonderful company with such a great mission: to be able to provide that extra practice and that assistance to people with aphasia. You know, I have all their apps. I had all of their apps before I became a consultant for them. So, I've loved them before I started working with them. And I love that, also, Tactus Therapy has lots of free resources on their website as well. It's not just their apps. They have tons of articles, different evidence-based protocols, handouts that you can download and you can bring to your next session. Really great for anyone that's working with aphasia or wants to work with aphasia.

Mattie Murrey

I have some of their free things as well, and some of their paid programs or resources as well. It's one of my go-to resources. Any other resources you can think of?

Katie Brown

Well, when I think of person-centered care, I think of Sarah Baar with Honeycomb Speech Therapy. I think that she is a wonderful resource. I do not personally have her Activity Studio, but from what I have seen, it is fantastic. And I think that it would be a really good one-stop shop for anyone that's interested in working with the adult neuro population as well.

Mattie Murrey

So, I know when I work with students, they're really trying to figure out where they want to go with their careers, which is why we're starting this series of Med SLP. But in graduate school, I really encourage them to take the time and look for those resources. So, when they do launch into their clinical fellows, where time is much more limited — and now you've got productivity



and other things that you need to respond to — to take the time and search out these resources now, and organize and file and do all of those things.

Katie Brown

Absolutely. Absolutely. And your students are lucky to have you telling them to do that. Because there are plenty out there that don't give any resources, you know? And I think that that is a great thing for them to be able to do. There are a lot of free resources out there that they can download, print, and mass distribute to their students to be able to keep and store in their clinical library for years to come.

Mattie Murrey

And I think an important thing that I want to pull out is, any one of these programs, — mine included — our objective is to support one another, support our profession, and support those that we work with. And so, you know, these are not companies trying to make a buck off people. These are companies and businesses that are led by passionate speech pathologists and audiologists. I know we have some audiologists that listen to this as well. But go, learn, connect, and pick up on that energy and that drive in somebody else who has created those resources. Use them.

Katie Brown

Absolutely. You know, just to touch on that connect portion. As a medical-based speech pathologist, there are many positions where you are probably going to be the only speech-language pathologist in a building or within a group of buildings. So, it can be rather isolating. And I think that building a community behind you, of other like-minded speech pathologists and people who have been through that, is crucial for anyone just starting out.

Mattie Murrey

I agree. That's why we have the community, the Fresh SLP. It's a community. You know, you asked earlier, we put a plug in. It's a community where students, fresh SLPs, [and] new SLPs can come and ask these questions that they don't want to ask on med SLP Facebook. You know, there was a student who asked a question about a video maybe a month ago and she got grilled. And sometimes, you need to find a safe spot where you can... You know, you're moving from your grad school cohort. You're moving on into, you know, finding and networking with other speech pathologists who think the same way you do and can support you.

Katie Brown

Of course. And that fear of being ripped apart by your peers for asking a question, for wanting to learn more, is unfortunate. And these communities that we've mentioned, that's not there.

Mattie Murrey

No, it's not.

Katie Brown



It's support. It's mentorship, and it's knowing that you can improve.

Mattie Murrey

Right. Exactly. And honestly, that's why I love what is happening with this podcast. Because guests like you come on, and other people come on, and they're so passionate about what they do. And I want students to know, we've got you. We're supporting you. You're our future cohort or future colleagues.

Katie Brown

Absolutely. And you know, I'm very active on social media. And I get people who message me daily asking questions. I think maybe it's because they're nervous to post them in those forums for fear of, you know, something happening. And I'm always happy to provide advice as best as I can and support other speech pathologists. I love taking on a mentor role.

Mattie Murrey

Well, in our show notes for this episode is going to be all of your contact information. So, go look for the Katie Brown show notes section, and the connection review at the end of the show notes — before the transcription, but at the end of the initial part. Tell me, any more about learning you want to mention or talk about?

Katie Brown

I don't think there's really any more about learning. I think that, in general, as a speech pathologist that is medically based, every day, you're probably going to see something that you have never seen before. So, it's very important to be reading up on these things.

Mattie Murrey

I'm chuckling because, you know, I've got a few years in and I've seen a lot of rodeos, and I still... Yeah, one of my favorite ones was, I had a gentleman in my video fluoroscopy chair, he says, "Yeah, I used to **have a two thing**, but I'm doing just fine now. I keep getting pneumonia. My daughter wants me to come and get this done." I'm like, "Okay." So, following MBSImP protocol, we started with a thin: Take a small sip. Hold and swallow. Bang, straight into his lungs. You know? And he said, "Well, how did I do?" So, you've just got to keep your eyes wide open, smile on your face, positive attitude, and just accept what comes at you. Learn. And yeah, I just love what we do.

Katie Brown

And be flexible. I love what we do, too. I am a lifelong learner, and speech pathology allows you to really embrace that side.

Mattie Murrey

It does. You know about the ACE Awards. Can you mention the ACE Awards for students who might not know what they are?

Katie Brown



Of course. So yeah, the ACE Awards is an award by ASHA for getting... I believe it's 70 hours of continuing education within a 36-month period.

Mattie Murrey

That's right.

Katie Brown

Yes. So, people who do a lot of continuing education, if you meet the requirement of getting 70 hours within 36 months, ASHA presents an Ace Award.

Mattie Murrey

So, you mentioned you have a young son at home — seven months — and I'm assuming an older one.

Katie Brown

Yeah, I have an almost three year old, too.

Mattie Murrey

So, you're busy. How do you manage your career, your life, your coffee-drinking, your baking, your husband? How do you manage all of your passions that you do?

Katie Brown

Sure. So, I don't do it all on my own. I have a lot of help. I have a lot of help. I have a nanny, and that is something — I'm going to get real with you here — that was something that almost... When I had to hire a nanny, it was very hard for me. I felt like I was almost like a failure as a mom for not being able to juggle all of these things. But I've learned that's just not true. So, for anyone out there that is a mom that has lots of career aspirations, just because you're not spending 24/7 with your child does not mean that you are a failure. You need to drop that mom guilt. So, I have a lot of help.

Mattie Murrey

There's a lot of different paths that we all take. And one path is not better than another. It's just, it's somebody else's path.

Katie Brown

Absolutely. Absolutely. I have a lot of help. I have a nanny that is here from seven to 4:15, which is great. My husband is incredibly supportive. He's also a business owner. So, the flexibility that both of our schedules provide us allows us to accommodate for random occurrences that might occur out of the typical nine-to-five business area. And I feel like I embrace the season that I'm living in, you know? I don't like to think of it to necessarily be work-life balance. Because I feel like work-life balance was a term that was created in order to make you feel like you're not balancing and to make you feel bad about yourself. So, I don't really subscribe to that. I think that there are areas where you are going to work more, and there are areas where you're going to work less and you're going to be more focused on your family. And I don't think that's



something to make yourself feel bad about. For example, a couple weeks ago, I had the opportunity to create content for a course for a rehab company. And I worked after hours every single day for a couple of weeks on it. So, would I be considered work-life balance there? Definitely not. However, this past weekend, I've been able to spend the whole weekend with my family, with my boys. And it's just the season that I was in.

Mattie Murrey

I love that way of thinking. I too spend extra time doing what I love. And that's what fills my drive. And, for me, my gosh. I can work all day on campus. I work clinics on Friday. And then I can come home and sit and create still. And that's what I love. My children are grown, and you're right, it's not really the balance. Because if it's off, then you think something's wrong. I like the way you frame that.

Katie Brown

Yeah. I don't think that people should feel ashamed if they're not perfectly balanced, right? We're thinking about a scale. Those sides are never going to be even. Likely never, but I'm just saying never. But likely never going to be even, and they're always going to be shifting.

Mattie Murrey

Yeah. You gave me something to think about. That's good. That's good.

Katie Brown

It took me a while to get to that realization. I did. It took me a while to get to that realization. All of my sisters and all of my sister-in-laws are stay-at-home moms. I am the odd one out in that case. And that always just... You know, as a mom and as someone that has a lot of big career goals, that was always just something that never sat right with me. And it did take a while for me to get to that place. And it's always a work in progress.

Mattie Murrey

But that's who you are. And that's who they are. And when we stay true to our choices, our lives, our values, that's the important part. Not living somebody else's life after somebody else's rules or somebody else's decisions.

Katie Brown

Absolutely. I think you're going to be a lot happier person once you accept that, both personally and professionally. Work and life, right? You're going to be a more dedicated clinician not worrying about outside factors, and you're going to be more present with your family not worrying about work and anything like that.

Mattie Murrey

So, next question about ethical settings. You're shaking your head yes. Because I ask every guest, "Is there anything you would like me to ask in your episode?" And you said, "Yep, ask me about ethical settings." So, what can you tell the new speech pathologist about ethical settings?



Katie Brown

Okay, so within my five years as a speech pathologist, I've only been full-time... I started my private practice, coming up on two years ago. However, I was full-time private practice... About a year ago is when I really went full-time into private practice. So, I had four years under my belt of working in a variety of settings. I worked a little bit in acute care. I worked in skilled nursing. Home health. Outpatient therapy as well. So, I have had a little taste of everything across the continuum of care. And I can tell you that my biggest advice for a new CF or a new graduate student, or someone who's just graduating, is that every CF is going to have growing pains. You know, that's the nature of being a new graduated clinician and in your first job. But make sure that whatever position you take, that the company is ethical and will support you. It's unfortunate to say, but there are some shady companies out there. You should ask the right questions during your interviews, such as productivity requirements, access to instrumentation for dysphasia, and to expected hours and caseload and, you know, expectations of you as a speech pathologist. You know, I don't want to be too dim and grim. There are some wonderful companies out there as well. But I just want to bring home... Just make sure that the place that you work is right for you. And don't be afraid to look for a new opportunity if your current position isn't working for you, and they're compromising your ethical standards.

Mattie Murrey

And turn to your clinical-fellow supervisors for support.

Katie Brown

Absolutely.

Mattie Murrey

I had one clinical fellow student. I supervised him, and he was being asked to travel between all these facilities and do some things that were just questionable. So, we worked on him self-advocating for himself. So, let's take just a little bit of a deeper dive. You know, you gave some of the questions to ask: productivity and your access to instrumentation. What are the answers to those questions? What is a reasonable productivity? And what is reasonable access to instrumentation? Are you talking MBS? Or are you talking FEES? I mean, what are you talking?

Katie Brown

I would say both. Whatever is appropriate. Some geographical regions do not have the luxury of having something like a mobile FEES provider. So, I wouldn't say that, if that's not available, that's not appropriate, or you know, that that's not a good setting for you to work in. But I think that you should be able to have access to the instrumentation that's needed for that clinical profile for that specific patient. Right? Rather than a blanket of, "Well, you can just change their diet. They're clearly aspirating. Just change their diet. You don't need an instrumental." Which has been said to me a million times. I've had things that said to me, "Oh, you'll be able to identify aspiration more with the longer that you work. You'll learn."

Mattie Murrey



It goes back to the story I told you about just a few minutes ago. He sat and silently aspirated, like a large amount. So, in essence, you're saying that if you step into a setting, one of the questions is: If I'm going to be in my clinical fellowship, do the patients that I work with have access to instrumental swallow studies where I can send them out or they can come in?

Katie Brown

Absolutely. Yes. I think that's one very, very big factor. For me, personally, at least. I had a great, great deal of pushback from a setting that I worked in regarding that, to the point where they called higher-ups, and it was not the best. However, I stuck to my guns. And do you want to know what? I stuck to my guns. I presented research. I advocated and advocated, and it didn't change. So, I left that position. There is... Well, number one, I wouldn't just say, "Oh, they say no to an instrumental? Well, I'm quitting." Right? We need to advocate for change within our profession. We need to present the research. We need to educate. We need to provide in-services. But there are cases where, sometimes, that's just not enough. Sometimes, the company's just too entrenched in their ways, or they're very focused on profit-first rather than patient-first. And that's unfortunate. And I think, in order to save yourself — your own mental energy, your own personal — you know, your energy is sacred. And if you are bringing that home with you, that heaviness of "I didn't do right by my patient," you need to leave that. So, that's what I did. I left that facility. And I don't regret it one bit.

Mattie Murrey

Here's a little trick. Here's a little HR trick. Because I worked for a SNF one time, and I had a disagreement with them regarding — I'm trying to figure out how much to discuss here — where they were asking me to do something, and I didn't agree with them either. And so, I quote unquote... It went higher up, and I got written up because I wasn't being compliant with what they were asking me to do. But I wasn't going to be compliant because I didn't agree with what they were asking me to do. And so, I got like I said, "written up." But if you're in a setting and you get written up for something, you can sign the bottom of the paper saying that, yes, you had this discussion. But you don't have to sign it and say you agree with them. Does that make sense?

Katie Brown

Yeah. I did not get to the point I was making, but I certainly, if that was the case, would have done exactly what you did. I stuck to my guns, and they ended up caving. But they said, "But we're not going to do this again."

Mattie Murrey

Yes. Yes. They presented me with the writing up. And I said, "Well, you know, I don't agree," and then they backed down. And sometimes, they'll push and push and push. And you do have to stand up and stand. And that's when the community comes in, where you reach out to your mentor or your supervisor or other skilled clinicians who, you know, have been through those



scenarios, and say, "It is okay. You are going to survive. And if you shift settings, or you leave the job, you know, here's what happens. Or if you stay..."

Katie Brown

So, I think that... Just more on this topic. A red-flag phrase, for me, is if someone higher up in the facility that you're working in, or the company you're working with, says, "Well, this is the way we've always done it," that's a big red flag for me. Because that means that they're not open to change, and they're not open to learning something new. And it's probably not going to be a very conducive environment for evidence-based practice. Because that's what was said to me: "How come all the speech pathologists before you could change diets at the bedside? And how come you can't?" Well, because that was 20 years ago. And we have more research now and know better now.

Mattie Murrey

Being a brave speech pathologist. Standing up.

Katie Brown

Yes. And you know what? It is not easy to be brave when you are a clinical fellow. It's not. That should also be acknowledged, that it is not easy to be brave when you're a clinical fellow. But you know, even little things... I remember when I went up to a — in this particular case, it was a nurse practitioner — who said that he did not believe in instrumental evaluations.

Mattie Murrey

Oh. Wow.

Katie Brown

Oh, yes. He did not believe in them. And he said, "Well, we know he's aspirating. So, put him on honey and thick liquids, and put him on clysis because he'll get dehydrated. So yeah. So, clysis, for anyone that doesn't know, is a hydration method. So, I practiced in the mirror what I was going to say to him. Right? I had my list of summarized research. I practiced so I sounded confident. This was years ago. I wasn't as seasoned of a speech pathologist quite yet, and it was very nerve-wracking. And I remember shaking going into work that day, knowing that I was going to try and get my point across. I don't want to say confront, but that ended up kind of being what it was because he was not open to change. But you know, it's not easy to be confident in these situations, especially as someone that doesn't have a ton of clinical experience. Because they may just throw that back at you: "Well, you haven't been working for a long time. So, you'll learn." I don't think that... You should not take that as an answer.

Mattie Murrey

I agree. Final question: Any words of wisdom — overall words of wisdom or very specific words of wisdom — for the new speech pathologist?

Katie Brown



Sure. I think my words of wisdom would be to bet on yourself. Put the work in. Do what you want to do. That's what I did with my private practice. I bet on myself, and it was one of the scariest things that I've ever done. And I'm feeling more fulfilled personally and professionally than I ever have. I'm treating the population and the patients that I want to treat. And it's because I took the risk to bet on myself. And I think that it wasn't... You don't need to do it in a risky way, right? Like, you don't need to drop everything and move across the country or to a different country or something like that. But you need to have the confidence in yourself to succeed.

Mattie Murrey

That's a great note to end on. Thank you for your time, Katie.

Katie Brown

Thank you so much for having me. This was a lot of fun.

