

Service provision for post-stroke aphasia in acute and sub-acute settings: Solutions for addressing the evidence-practice gaps

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Background

Aphasia, a language-based communication disability, is experienced by 30% of stroke survivors and is associated with increased health care costs and length of hospital stay, along with significant risks of social isolation, depression and ill health. Recent research and audits of stroke care in Australia reveal that current service provision to people with aphasia does not meet best practice standards, and in acute care has been found to be sub-optimal. Research evidence suggests intense schedules of aphasia intervention may lead to superior outcomes in sub-acute care, however these are rarely implemented. Such evidence-practice gaps require examination in order to address the inequity for this large sub-population of people after stroke.

Aims

This presentation reports on the integrated findings from our recent program of research examining 1) the evidence base for aphasia management in acute and sub-acute care, and 2) the barriers and facilitators to implementing best practice.

Methods

We conducted a series of studies including 1) systematic reviews of the literature concerning speech pathology management of aphasia in acute hospital settings, and the relative efficacy of intense and non-intense treatment schedules for sub-acute aphasia; 2) two national surveys of speech pathology practice in aphasia management and in managing psychological wellbeing in people with aphasia; and 3) in-depth interviews with speech pathologists concerning perceptions of their role in acute aphasia management and implementing best practice.

Results

Evidence-based best practice statements for aphasia management have been developed and published in the Australian Aphasia Rehabilitation Pathway. Evidence-practice gaps include inadequate treatment intensity, limited client involvement in goal setting, inconsistent provision of aphasia-friendly education, and a lack of communicatively accessible environments.

Discussion

This presentation presents an overview of the evidence-practice gaps in managing aphasia in acute and sub-acute settings and suggests solutions for addressing these gaps across the multi-disciplinary team.