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The Impact of an Intensive Comprehensive Aphasia Program on Verbal Discourse in Stroke Survivors with Chronic Aphasia

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BACKGROUND & SIGNIFICANCE

**Aphasia** is the impairment of the expression and/or comprehension of language following brain injury

**Aphasia Rehabilitation Goals**
- Goal of aphasia therapy is to help the person with aphasia (PWA) rejoin activities and reduce the impact of aphasia on their life (Hickin et al. 2015)
- PWAs become isolated when they are unable to converse and/or communicate with others (Hickin et al. 2015)
- Verbal discourse therapy targets connected speech across a variety of genres including: conversation, procedural discourse, & storytelling
- Improving verbal discourse can be achieved by verb retraining, semantic therapy, & syntactic therapy (Edmonds, et al., 2009; Carragher, et al., 2015)
- Producing complex sentences improves verbal discourse skills by helping the PWA convey their message clearly and efficiently (Hickin, et al., 2015)
- Multilevel therapy is beneficial to improve verbal discourse by addressing a range of the client’s impairments (Carragher, et al., 2015; Milman, et al., 2014)
- When PWAs can converse and communicate with others, they can return to their prior level of activity, thus reducing feelings of isolation (Hickin, et al., 2015)

**Intensive Comprehensive Aphasia Programs (ICAPS)**
- A holistic, evidence-based service delivery model that targets impairment, activity, and participation domains of the WHO-IFC model (WHO, 2001) to improve language and functional communication (Rose et al., 2013)
- Minimum of 3 hours of therapy per day for 2 weeks
- Must include individual and group treatment
- Includes a cohort of participants that all start and stop treatment at the same time

METHODS

**Participants**
- Eight adults (18+ years old) at least three months post-stroke
- Stroke survivors who present with aphasia
- Medically stable and able to tolerate intensive therapy

**Procedures**
- Research design: retrospective quantitative analysis of outcome data
- PWAs participated in a 4 week ICAP during the summer of 2018 at the University of Montana (4 days per week, 4.5 hours per day)
- Prior to and immediately following treatment, all participants underwent a comprehensive cognitive-linguistic and psychosocial evaluation
- ICAP treatment included individual, group, and technology-based speech, language, and cognitive therapy sessions, recreational outings, and home programming
- To assess the impact of the ICAP on verbal discourse outcomes, the *Spontaneous Speech* subtest of the *Western Aphasia Battery-Revised* (Kertesz, 2006) and correct information units (CIUs; Nicholas & Brookshire, 1993) were analyzed

PRELIMINARY DATA

- 7/8 PWA improved overall language skills following ICAP
- 5/8 PWA demonstrated improved spontaneous speech/verbal discourse following ICAP
- PWA-30: no change on any measures of spontaneous speech
- PWA-32: analysis of CIUs demonstrated positive change from 42 to 77 informative pieces of information

DISCUSSION & IMPACT

- The UM ICAP appears to improve overall expressive and receptive language outcomes for most PWA
- The UM ICAP appears to improve spontaneous speech for most PWA
- Treatment targeting word and sentence production allows PWA to create complex sentences, thus improving their overall conversational discourse
- Increasing communication skills and conversational discourse can combat loneliness and social isolation in everyday life (Hickin, et al., 2015)