A virtual communication partner instruction group in support for adults with progressive aphasia: Rationale, development, and preliminary execution guidelines

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Introduction
- Over 2.5 million Americans are living with aphasia1, a language disorder caused by injury or disease to the language network.
- Primary progressive aphasia (PPA) is caused by neurodegenerative disease (e.g., AD, FTD), and progression includes global cognitive and communication disruption.

Problem
- Aphasia negatively impacts the individual’s quality of life.2
- Aphasia – due to either stable or progressive cause - is a chronic condition that benefits from therapeutic intervention and communicative supports (e.g., communication partner support, AAC strategies, environmental modifications).3
- Many people with PPA (PWPPA) are unable to continue with treatment due to the lack of recognition of the benefits of speech-language services for PPA by insurance providers and the cost of private treatment.3

Potential Solution
- Communication Partner Instruction (CPI) is an evidence-based approach that focuses on instructing communication partners on how to best provide communicative support for a person with aphasia. The goal of CPI is to encourage the development of individualized strategies that improve message transmission and reduce the frustrations of communication breakdowns.4
- The American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA) and the American Heart Association (AHA) deem CPI a vital part of cognitive-communication therapy for adults with stable or progressive disorders.4,5
- Group therapy activities can be a cost-effective way to administer therapy in aphasia. The goal of this project is to design and implement a curriculum of group CPI administered virtually to PWPPA and their primary communication partners.

Methods
- The UNM Neuroscience of Rehabilitation Lab has designed Stable and Progressive Aphasia Center (SPACE) Teams, a virtual CPI group for PWPPA and communication partners (CPs) to attend together (dyads).
- A cohort of 5 dyads (5 PWPPA and their 5 CPs) meet once monthly for one-hour over the course of a semester (5 months).
- Meetings are held over Zoom.
- Each SPACE Teams session aims to:
  1. educate members about aphasia and common naming errors
  2. provide supported communication for PWPPA and identify current strategies
  3. evaluate current strategies and identify potential new strategies
  4. assemble a strategy toolkit and troubleshooting support
  5. expand communication partnership and self-advocacy

Between sessions, dyads maintain a communication log, making note of communication breakdowns, strategies (if any) used, frustration level, success of communication/communication strategies

Example: education slides used in virtual sessions for PWPPA and CP

Anticipated Outcomes
- Teach dyads about aphasia that naming errors can contain helpful information that could be used to support communication
- Host a place to discuss the impact of aphasia on dyads
- Train dyads on common communication strategies used to support adults with aphasia
- Utilizing individual linguistic or communication strengths to support communication
- Keep communication log between sessions to identify breakdowns in communication and current communication strategies
- Generate solution-oriented communication strategies for a variety of situations and environments & share ideas with other dyads
- Construct and maintain “aphasia toolkit”: individualized set of strategies to support communication that include
  1. Compensatory strategies (e.g., using gesture, providing cues, asking yes/no questions)
  2. Augmented alternative communication (e.g., writing, drawing, speech-to-text devices)
  3. Environmental modifications (e.g., reduce distractions, sit where faces are visible)

Future Plans
- Maintain a CPI-graduate group where future cohorts of dyads who have completed CPI will meet monthly to discuss/maintain/evolve communication strategies
- Continue SPACE Teams with a new cohort of 5 dyads each fall and spring semester
- Design outcome measures for future research

References