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The Speech-Language Pathologist's Role in Stroke Recovery

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Treating patients who have experienced a stroke involves a team of highly trained professionals that may include a Speech-language pathologist (SLP), physical therapist, and occupational therapist. It is important that stroke patients begin receiving therapy as soon as possible. The SLP's role is to help the patient with communication and swallowing deficits that may occur after having a stroke. These may include:

- **Dysphagia** – difficulty swallowing, mostly when eating or drinking
- **Receptive Aphasia** – difficulty understanding language and what others are saying
- **Expressive Aphasia** – difficulty speaking or saying the right word
- **Dysarthria** – difficulty forming sounds and words due to weak muscles in the mouth
- **Reading and Writing** – difficulty reading or writing
- **Memory Loss** – difficulty remembering current or past events, appointments, names of objects and people, etc.

Patients may experience one or more of these at the same time.



After experiencing a stroke, patients may have issues with cognitive skills (thinking, understanding, learning, and memory functions). A speech-language pathologist can help by suggesting different **language strategies** such as:



- **Retraining word retrieval** – helping the patient remember words and communicate with others



- **Group therapy sessions** – having several people in one session to help with regaining the patient's conversational skills



- **Social skills lessons** – helping the patient work on starting a conversation, asking the right questions, making appropriate comments, understanding when conversations need to end, or changing topics, etc.



- **Role-playing situations** – acting out different conversations that may take place in the community or home.

and coping skills such as:



- **Memory Log** – writing in a journal to help with remembering daily activities



- **Organizer** – using a calendar to help remember appointments, birthdays, special events, etc.



- **Self-monitoring** – regulating one's behavior to accommodate social situations and respond to social cues in the hospital, home, and community.

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Speech-language pathologists also work with stroke patients who have difficulty swallowing. The SLP first evaluates the patient's ability to swallow and then educates the patient and caregiver with suggestions that may include:



- Changing consistency of the patient's food and liquids
- Positioning the patient in different ways while he/she is eating and drinking
- Using different feeding techniques.

Helping patients recover from a stroke is a team effort. The team involves not only a speech-language pathologist, but an occupational and a physical therapist as well.



The physical therapist's role includes:

- Helping with balance, walking, and regaining muscle strength.
- Fitting and training the patient with equipment (if needed) such as a wheelchair, cane, walkers, etc.
- Providing training to caregivers.



The occupational therapist's role includes:

- Helping with self-care skills and adapting the patient's environment for daily living.
- Addressing difficulties with weakness, sensory loss, cognitive or visual impairments, and the correct use of adaptive equipment to help with activities of daily living (ADL).
- Training and educating caregivers to help care for the stroke patient.



Recovering from a stroke involves a team of highly trained professionals to assess the patient's overall health, identify areas affected by a stroke, and prepare a treatment plan. It is also extremely important that caregivers be very involved in every aspect of the patient's therapy in order to assist with carryover and maintain overall patient safety.

Resources:

American Physical Therapy Association. Physical Therapist's Guide to Stroke. Retrieved May 11, 2016 from <http://www.moveforwardpt.com/symptomsconditionsdetail.aspx?cid=929683c9-e6ab-4b0b-ad65-1c4d69dfa269>

The American Occupational Therapy Association, Inc. The Role of Occupational Therapy in Stroke Rehabilitation. Retrieved on May 11, 2016 from <http://www.aota.org/about-occupational-therapy/professionals/rdp/stroke.aspx>

American Speech-Language-Hearing Association. Stroke. Retrieved on May 11, 2016 from <http://www.asha.org/public/speech/disorders/Stroke/>

Stroke Association. Speech and language therapy after stroke. Retrieved on May 11, 2016 from http://www.stroke.org.uk/sites/default/files/F14_Speech%20and%20lanuage%20therapy_1.pdf

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