

SPEECH & LANGUAGE THERAPY DEPARTMENT, NHS NORTH LANCASHIRE

PROVIDING ENHANCED SPEECH & LANGUAGE THERAPY USING COMPUTER TECHNOLOGY

SUMMARY

- An estimated 150,000 people having a stroke each year in the UK, means that there is pressure across the UK to deliver the speech and language therapy (SLT) 'in excess of two hours' set out in the National Stroke Strategy as necessary for recovery
- Speech and Language Therapists (SLTs) in North Lancashire collaborated with Blackpool Fylde and Wyre Hospitals, NHS Foundation Trust, including Clifton and Rossall Hospital and the Stroke Association to provide enhanced therapy using computer technology
- This innovative approach aims to improve recovery potential by increasing access to therapy for more people needing SLT than can be provided on a 1:1 basis
- Patient benefits include enhanced access to therapy; a choice of when, where and how to access therapy; and reassurance that they are receiving up-to-date, individually focused therapy
- Enhanced therapy is provided not by increasing staff numbers, but by using existing staff creatively and in combination with 21st century technology
- The changes to traditional delivery methods have been well received by SLTs, who are motivated by the prospect of speedy delivery of quality therapy. For example in Blackpool where the SLT Assistant already worked on the Acute Stroke Ward, she now runs computer therapy groups to enable out patients to access more therapy
- The innovation has just completed its first three month cycle and evaluation is due to begin in December, with a final report due in March 2011. Anecdotal reports from participants suggest good uptake, enjoyment and benefit from using the programme
- Early data collection is showing encouraging evidence of improvement e.g. one patient who received 7 hours therapy using traditional methods during a 3 month period in early 2010, compared with 24 hours of computer therapy received during the first 3 months of this innovation

KEY OUTCOMES

- Benefits to patients are expected to include; improved recovery rates from treatment delivered more speedily and intensively; greater choice in when, where and how to access therapy; individually focused therapy
- Staff are encouraged and motivated by the ability to deliver service in line with National Stroke Strategy recommendations



BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- Around one third of stroke admissions will need speech and language therapy (SLT), in addition to SLT referrals from the community. The population served by Blackpool hospital includes a significant proportion of elderly people. In 2008/09 stroke admissions totalled 781
- An audit conducted in 2005 by the SLT team revealed that they were offering only 50% of the two hours therapy each week recommended by the National Stroke Strategy (i.e. a maximum of one hour a week was offered to patients on average)

WHAT WAS DONE?

- Computer therapy is offered to patients in the acute stage of stroke where appropriate, whilst still in hospital to maximise their recovery at the crucial initial stage and offer intensity of treatment
- Groups of outpatients attend therapy groups where they have access to laptops loaded with therapy software. Supervised by an SLT Assistant, patients are able to work individually to improve their language skills using laptops loaded with language software tailored to their needs
- An initial 6 week pilot programme completed in November 2009 elicited positive feedback from patients. A £50,000 Innovation Award from NHS NW was then secured in January 2010 to deliver the service with evaluation due in MARCH 2011

- Breakdown of costs:
 - o £14 k for 21 Laptops (10 at group sites; 11 for therapists to use in hospital and on domiciliary visits)
 - o £2k for adaptive equipment (keyboards etc)
 - o £1k Step by Step software training
 - o £10.4k user licence bundle
 - o £2k user home licence bundle
 - o £12.8k for 21 React2 licences
 - o £2k to cover promotion at conferences and meetings
- A variety of approaches was used to deliver training to NHS staff (SLT therapists; trainee assistant practitioner on stroke ward; assistant practitioner from Early Supported Discharge/ESD Team) including:
 - o Formal group and 1:1 sessions
 - o Remote sessions using internet and telephone links
 - o Ongoing e-mail support
- NHS staff (SLT Project Lead) cascaded training to Stroke Association volunteers (1x Communication Co-ordinator; 4x Information, Advice and Support Co-ordinators)
- Staff and volunteers enjoyed varying levels of computer literacy. All were motivated by the prospect of improved service delivery and patient benefit and are now delivering computer therapy with confidence
- The SLTs at NHS North Lancashire have found that patients are keen to be involved in the therapy, even those who had never previously used a computer
- The innovation is using up-to-date software and as this is becoming the preferred model of service delivery, there is confidence that updates will be met from existing budgets

- Security of the hardware considered a risk in the early stages has not been an issue, as computer groups are run by the SLT Assistant and the laptops are not loaned out

KEY LEARNING

- It is important to keep up-to-date with national policies which impact on service delivery. For example, Transforming Community Services document gave the project leader confidence in her ability as a clinical leader to bid for new resources; to work with partners; and to use 21st century technology
- Patients appreciate and want new forms of therapy; technology is not a barrier when it is supported
- Importance of targeting staff skills more precisely e.g. SLTs write the therapy 'prescriptions' using the software and load these onto the laptops; the band 3 SLT Assistant or a trained volunteer from the Stroke Association can 'dispense' the therapy



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