Challenges for People with Acquired Language Disorders in an Increasingly Digital Social World

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Acquired Language Disorders

“Aphasia”

- About 85% of population has never heard the term “aphasia.”

- About 9% of people who have heard the term do not know it’s a language disorder.

An *acquired* language disorder affecting people who had attained full skill with their native language.
Most Common Cause of Aphasia

Strokes

Damage those areas of the brain subserving language.

Approximately 1/3 of all strokes result in aphasia.

75% of people having strokes are 65 years old and older
Depending on site and extent of damage within the brain’s “zone of language”, aphasia affects...

Production of...
- Oral language (speaking)
- Written language (writing)

Understanding ...
- Spoken language (auditory comprehension)
- Written language (reading)
Relevant to writing and reading...

Strokes causing aphasia may also cause:

- Paralysis or weakness of the right arm and leg.
- Inability to see the right side of space.
Aphasia is devastating.

_Profound effect on the person’s life..._

- Employment
- Finances
- Maintenance of relationships with family and friends
  - Social isolation
  - Emotional distress
  - Depression
Compared internet use in...

- 25 people with aphasia
- 17 people without aphasia.

Findings...

Aphasia negativity affects use and proficiency of the internet.

Other negative factors:

- age
- education
- previous use and experience with technology
- availability of proxies (people who could help with the processes)
National Aphasia Association

Website list of online aphasia communities and support groups:

• Aphasia Corner
• Faces of Aphasia
• Aphasia Will Not Be Silent
• Stroke Comeback Center
• Mindpop
• Speechless Mariah Rose’s Ramblings
• (Facebook Group) Aphasia Recovery Connections
Online aphasia communities and support groups all require..

**LANGUAGE**

- Ability to write and read (all).

- Producing and understanding spoken messages (some).

- People with right-sided paralysis or weakness → only nondominant, left-hand for mechanics of typing.

- People with visual-field cuts → may not scan the entire screen.
Communicating Through Photos Despite Aphasia


Over 5 billion people world-wide have mobile phones.

Many phones have a camera and can store photos in “albums”.

“... the role of the Internet in people’s lives is vital for the long-term rehabilitation of people with aphasia and particularly in enabling people with aphasia to live successfully with the condition, engaging in an ever more digital world.”