Aphasia: Strategies for Successful Communication

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Presenter Disclosure Information

• Wendy Greenspan
• Aphasia: Strategies for Successful Communication
• FINANCIAL DISCLOSURE:
  No relevant financial relationship exists
Our Agenda

• Effective communication
  – Essential to quality healthcare

• Communication support
  – A patient’s right
  – Simple strategies to
    • Help patients with aphasia understand you
    • Help patients with aphasia express themselves
Broad application of strategies

• Focus will be on aphasia
• However, strategies apply to many other communication disabilities
  – Dysarthria
  – Hearing loss
  – Dementia
  – Patients with tracheostomies
  – Patients with limited English proficiency (not a disability).
Joint Commission

• “Advancing Effective Communication, Cultural Competence and Patient- and Family-Centered Care”
• Standards to ensure effective communication
• Patients have a right to communication supports
Poor communication results in...

- Medical errors
- Negative health outcomes
- Increased health care costs
- Reduced compliance with recommendations

(Simmons-Mackie, 2013, p. 13)
Supported Conversation for Adults with Aphasia

• Competence
  – Masked by aphasia
  – Revealed through conversation supports

• Communication supports
  – Get the message in
  – Get the message out
  – Confirm the message

(Kagen, 1998)
What is the best way to help a person with aphasia?

1. Give them a picture communication board.
2. Use sign language.
3. Allow plenty of time for communication.
4. Say the word for them when they are struggling.
Acknowledging competence

• Use a respectful, adult manner of speaking.
• Address the patient.
• “I know the words are in your head – you just can’t get them out.”
Getting the message in...

Helping patients with aphasia understand you

- Quiet setting
- Take extra time: Speak slowly
- Short, simple sentences
- Repeat key points
Getting the message in...

Use visual information.

• Gestures
• Point to what you are talking about
• Write down key words
coughing,
fever
pneumonia ??
X-ray
Getting the message out...

Helping patients with aphasia express themselves

• Give them extra time.
• Listen without interrupting.
• Ask yes/no questions.
Getting the message out...

Use visual information

- Encourage gestures.
- Provide paper and a marker for writing or drawing.
- Give written choices.
Confirming the message

- Repeat key information.
- Write down important points.
- Circle what is agreed on, cross out errors.
Discharge - Monday

Rehab

Your house

Son's house
Discharge Monday

Rehab

Your house

Son’s house
Discharge-Monday

Rehab

Your house

Son's house
What is the **wrong** thing to do if you can’t understand a patient with aphasia?

1. Take a break and try again later.
2. Ask a family member for help.
3. Avoid frustrating the patient – don’t tell them you don’t understand.
4. Encourage the patient to use gestures.
The most important things to remember...

• Acknowledge competence.
• Allow extra time.
• Use visual information.
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References


