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June/July 2008

Communities of Practice: Communicative Access and Aphasia

The Seniors Health Research Transfer Network (SHRTN) has designed Communities of Practice (CoPs) which are groups of formal and informal caregivers, researchers, policymakers, educators, librarians and others who, due to their common interests, develop relationships that allow them to exchange information and knowledge on a specific topic related to seniors' health and healthcare. The Communicative Access and Aphasia Community of Practice is an excellent example of one of the 19 CoP's available on the SHRTN website.

Communicative Access: Action Through Knowledge Exchange

The ability to understand verbal information and to engage in conversation with health care providers is crucial to meaningful healthcare decision making. In fact, it is considered a fundamental human right to have equal access to information and decision-making. Unfortunately, aphasia and other communication disorders reduce an individual's ability to engage in these routine communication tasks, which are essential to participation in health care activities. Moreover, the individual with a communication disorder is often not included in health care conversations as their competence is questioned, based on their inability to understand and express themselves easily.

A highly supportive communication environment can greatly increase the opportunities for accurate information exchange and conversational interaction. The Communicative Access and Aphasia Community of Practice (CAA CoP), a CoP within the Seniors Health Research Transfer Network (SHRTN), supports health care professionals, researchers and policy-makers who are working to improve access to information and decision-making for anyone who 'knows more than he or she can say'. Individuals with aphasia benefit from efforts to improve communicative access, as do individuals with other types of communication disorders such as hearing loss, motor speech difficulties, and/or poor fluency in the dominant language.

Led by Elyse Shumway and Aura Kagan of the Aphasia Institute and supported by a SHRTN Knowledge Broker and Information Specialist, the membership of this CoP includes formal and informal caregivers from a variety of professional backgrounds. The CAA CoP provides access to:

- A Knowledge Broker who facilitates networking, connections, communications and knowledge translation
- Library Services that provide paid caregivers in the province of Ontario with free access to health related evidence and the services of Seniors Health Information Specialists
- Technology in the form of online tools that support collaboration
- The SHRTN Resource Centre, an online repository of links and resources related to communicative access, aphasia, and seniors health in general

In the spring of 2007, the CAA CoP conducted a comprehensive needs assessment. One of the priorities identified was the desire for education opportunities that would provide practical strategies to facilitate better conversation and verbal interaction with patients who have difficulty communicating. In collaboration with the Aphasia Institute and SHRTN, the CAA CoP provides online education sessions on a monthly basis. Megan, can you indicate if the following is a regular education session available through CoP or is it one of the monthly sessions??? And if it is a regular session can you add more detail to it – It looks terrific!!! "Introduction to Supported Conversation for Adults with Aphasia: Communicating with Patients/Clients Who Know More Than They Can Say" is a two-part learning opportunity that combines the flexibility of an online self-directed learning module with the practicality of a follow-up on-line knowledge exchange session discussing every-day applications.

In addition to education opportunities, this CoP currently offers access to:

- Research articles and literature searches
- Knowledge Broker services
- An Advocacy Working Group
- An Acute Care Working Group
- Evidence-based resources and tools

If you would like to learn more about the Communicative Access and Aphasia Community of Practice, contact the Knowledge Broker, Megan Harris at: meganharris@sympatico.ca or sign-up to be a member at www.shrtn.on.ca