Speech and language therapy provides life-changing treatment, support and care for children and adults who have difficulties with communication, or with eating, drinking and swallowing. From children born with cleft lip and palate to older people with dementia, speech and language therapists support individuals across the life span.

The expert assessment, advice and treatment provided by speech and language therapists creates financial savings for NHS services and produces improved outcomes for patients. An economic evaluation of the value of speech and language therapy, conducted by Matrix Evidence (a consultancy company which specialises in social return on investment studies) found the following:

**Dysphagia (swallowing problems) following stroke**
- **Every £1** invested in low intensity speech and language therapy generates **£2.3** in health care cost savings through avoided cases of chest infections.
- Speech and language therapists assess and manage stroke survivors’ difficulties swallowing foods and liquids, which can cause serious consequences, including choking, malnutrition, and death. Approximately **63,000 adults** per year in the UK have post-stroke dysphagia requiring speech and language therapy.
- The estimated annual net benefit of speech and language therapy is **£11.2M in England**, **£0.7M in Wales**, **£0.4M in Northern Ireland**, and **£1.1M in Scotland**.

**Aphasia (communication problems) following stroke**
- **Every £1** invested in enhanced speech and language therapy generates **£1.3** due to the monetary benefit associated with reduced symptoms of aphasia leading to improved health and ability to perform daily activities.
- Speech and language therapists support stroke survivors to strengthen and regain their language abilities and learn other communication methods. Around **53,000 adults** per year in the UK suffer post-stroke aphasia requiring speech and language therapy.
- The estimated annual net benefit is **£13.0M in England**, **£0.7M in Wales**, **£0.4M in Northern Ireland**, and **£1.1M in Scotland**.

**Speech and language impairment (SLI)**
- **Every £1** invested in enhanced speech and language therapy generates **£6.43** through increased lifetime earnings, because improved language facilitates access to the curriculum and creates opportunity for greater attainment and lifetime earning potential.
- Approximately **203,000 children** aged six to 10 years in the UK have SLI, requiring speech and language therapy.
- The estimated annual net benefit is **£623.4M in England**, **£36.1M in Wales**, **£24.2M in Northern Ireland**, and **£58M in Scotland**.

**Autism**
- **Every £1** invested in enhanced SLT generates **£1.46** through lifetime cost savings created by improved communication, such as reduced service use and increased levels of independent living in adulthood.
- Each year around **8,800 children** aged two to four years in the UK have core autism, requiring speech and language therapy.
- The estimated annual net benefit is **£8.3M in England**, **£0.3M in Wales**, **£0.3M in Northern Ireland**, and **£0.8M in Scotland**.
Augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) support

Cost benefit analysis tools also demonstrate the benefit of providing augmentative and alternative communication aids (high-tech equipment that helps communication) to children with autistic spectrum disorder and cerebral palsy. Based on a default set of modelling assumptions and applied to the population of Scotland:
- Every £1 invested in high-tech AAC for children with autism generates £1.79 – the monetary equivalent to the benefit generated in terms of quality adjusted life years (QALYs).
- Every £1 invested in high-tech AAC for children with cerebral palsy generates £1.23 – the monetary equivalent to the benefit generated in terms of QALYs.

Speech and language therapy support in action: urgent and emergency care

Speech and language therapists play an important role in delivering patient care in a variety of settings, including education, the NHS, the voluntary sector and private practice. Research also demonstrates the important role they play in delivering effective urgent and emergency care. As highlighted by the case study of Sandwell and West Birmingham NHS Trust, below, the expert assessment, diagnosis and support skills of speech and language therapists, can reduce A&E costs and improve patient outcomes.

Case study: Sandwell and West Birmingham NHS Trust

Speech and language therapists play a crucial role in the trust’s ‘rapid response therapy team’. They work alongside other allied health professionals and attend A&E to:
- Prevent unnecessary hospital admissions, via a highly-responsive service that assesses patient needs 12 hours a day, 365 days a year.
- Work collaboratively with social work colleagues to support the patient to return home.
- Deliver urgent speech and language therapy assessment to ensure patients’ swallowing can be managed at home by community staff.

Speech and language therapists have helped to reduce costs and improve patient outcomes at the Trust, by providing intensive speech and language therapy to ensure patients start eating and drinking as soon as possible. This avoids the use of tube feeding and allows a faster and safer return home with community support. As part of an integrated care approach, speech and language therapists also work closely with the discharging and community teams to ensure patients identified as at risk of re-admission receive appropriate support in the home setting.

The trust’s Integrated Care Service has helped to relieve winter pressures on A&E services and create financial savings and improved outcomes for patients. The trust has reduced hospital admissions by 2,478 per year, reduced length of stay in hospital from 10 days to seven days, and saved approximately 17,000 bed days, which has the potential to reduce costs by more than £7 million.

REFERENCES AND RESOURCES

2 Ibid.
3 Ibid.
4 Ibid.
5 Ibid.
6 Ibid.

For further information about The Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists please visit: www.rcslt.org