

Adapting to placements during a pandemic

I had the amazing opportunity to work in a Community Speech and Language Therapy team. The team covers two areas – Long Term Condition Management (LTCM) and Stroke Early Supported Discharge (ESD). The Community SLT team can see patients who have a variety of different conditions such as Motor Neurone Disease, Parkinson's Disease, Multiple Sclerosis, respiratory conditions such as COPD (Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease), dementia, stroke (after ESD) and generally frail and elderly patients, with associated swallowing and/or communication disorders. The team also sees adults with learning disabilities where their main difficulty is thought to be as a result of one of the conditions above.

I was able to observe my placement educator supporting dysphagia patients in care homes via telehealth. I mainly worked independently with two patients for my eight-week placement. Patient A with a diagnosis of multiple sclerosis and mild dysarthria characterised by reduced volume and variable imprecise articulation, as well as patient B who had experienced an acute left total anterior circulatory stroke and as a result, had moderate receptive and expressive aphasia.

With patient A I carried out a six-week in-house Loud Programme via Microsoft Teams to improve vocal loudness, practise variation in pitch, articulation and intelligibility. I learned a lot from this experience as I carried out the programme independently each week which I had never done before. I also researched further interventions and adapted them into the programme to ensure I remained patient centred. It really boosted my confidence to hear patient A's positive feedback about my sessions.

I really enjoyed creating resource sheets to support the patient to continue to use the strategies learned in therapy in daily life, as I could combine patient support with creativity. The challenges were that sometimes we experienced technical difficulties. This meant we had to re-arrange our session or revisit areas, so it was important to remain professional, flexible and adaptable.

With patient B, I carried out independent home visits during the Covid-19 pandemic and I had to wear PPE. Before each visit, I would conduct a telephone covid risk screen. I created a care plan and session plans for each week, which I ensured were engaging and motivating for the patient. I worked with the patient on different aspects of language such as comprehension and expression, reading and writing skills by creating tailored language activities. It was wonderful to see patient B's progress over a short period of time. The patient had improved in her comprehension and expressive skills over the course of two months of speech therapy input in comparison to baseline measurements.

My advice to future students going out on placement would be to make the most of every opportunity, put as much effort in as you possibly can as the more you put in the more you will get out of the experience. Ask questions as and when they arise and remember wherever you are challenged, you are equally supported.



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