



Introduction

COVID-19 has changed all our lives. For some, though, it will have repercussions that last for years to come, affecting their education, work, family life and mental health.

The UK-wide lockdown between March and June 2020 had a significant impact on the lives of people with communication and swallowing needs. It also had an impact on speech and language therapists' ability to support their clients, either because services were stopped or speech and language therapists were redeployed to other roles.

The Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists (RCSLT) salutes how speech and language therapists across the United Kingdom have adapted and continue to adapt the delivery of services in response to lockdown measures so they can meet the needs of their clients. These adaptations have included the greater use of telehealth, the training of other staff to support their work and changing usual working styles.

While this enabled some people with communication and swallowing needs to continue to receive the speech and language therapy (SLT) they and their loved ones needed during lockdown, not everyone has been so lucky.

As lockdown went on, the RCSLT became increasingly concerned about the ability of people with communication and swallowing needs to access the SLT they require. Our members told us about their worries about not being able to provide SLT to their clients. Charities representing people with communication and swallowing needs shared their concerns with us too and we also heard directly from people with such needs themselves.

To understand the impact of lockdown on access to SLT and to inform its response, the RCSLT decided to undertake a survey of service users' experiences. It wanted to hear what people with communication and swallowing needs thought about their access to SLT in lockdown, any new ways their SLT was delivered, the impact of this on their lives and on the lives of their families and carers, and what they thought about the future.

The RCSLT is very pleased that despite the pandemic and the barriers to full participation that some people with communication and swallowing needs have faced

and continue to face, so many people were still able to share their experiences with us. To give just one example of a participation barrier, local support groups have often not been meeting.

Given these known barriers to participation, the survey findings represent, potentially, just the tip of the iceberg of the challenges facing people with communication and swallowing needs.

This report tells the stories of over 500 people and their families and carers. It also provides us all with a blueprint with which together we can build back better with people who have communication and swallowing needs.

The RCSLT is deeply grateful to everyone who took the time and trouble to fill out the survey. To you, we say, 'Thank you very much for sharing your experiences with us. We hope that these will help make everyone's lives better.'