

RCSLT MANIFESTO BRIEFING - ADULTS



ADULTS - Ensure that every adult with communication difficulties has access to speech and language therapy so that they can express their choices, live well, and be independent for as long as possible.

WE ARE CALLING ON OUR POLITICAL PARTIES TO:

- Ensure that people with a dementia are referred to speech and language therapy for a communication assessment so that they can remain independent for as long as possible.
- Ensure that every stroke survivor is referred to speech and language therapy for an assessment of their communication and swallowing needs in the days immediately after their stroke so that they can be given a voice and can make a safe and good recovery.

THE BACKGROUND

Twenty per cent of the population will experience communication difficulties at some point in their lives. In addition to speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) that may accompany lifelong physical, sensory and learning disabilities, communication needs can arise as a result of an acquired illness or condition including brain injury, a dementia or stroke.

IN NORTHERN IRELAND

- There are around 19,000 people living with dementia and this is estimated to rise to 47,000 by 2051. Difficulties with eating, drinking and swallowing (dysphagia) are a recognised challenge for people with dementia, particularly in the later stages. It is estimated that 68% of those with a dementia in homes for the aged, have dysphagia.
- Overall costs of dementia in Northern Ireland have been calculated at £25,877 for individuals living at home and £31,296 for individuals in care homes per year. The importance of communication support is paramount in enabling a person with a dementia to live well, remain independent and at home for as long as possible and vitally help to reduce stress on their carers – as outlined in the publication 'Communicating effectively with a person living with a dementia' Public Health Agency January 2014.
- At present there is only one dedicated speech and language therapy post commissioned for dementia patients in the whole of Northern Ireland.
- In Northern Ireland more than 4,000 people have a stroke each year and a third of stroke survivors will have some level of communication difficulties following their stroke. Initially 40% will experience some level of difficulty in swallowing. Speech and language therapy is an essential support for individuals following a stroke as Clodagh's case study demonstrates.

Speech and Language Therapy assessment post stroke



On Easter Monday 2015, Clodagh 36, a serving Northern Ireland police officer, attended the emergency department in a local hospital as she was feeling unwell. Clodagh was subsequently diagnosed as having had a stroke. Clodagh was left totally paralysed from the head down and experienced a complete loss of the ability to communicate.

Clodagh was unable to convey to her family and staff that she was, despite appearances, fully able to understand conversations and speech. Despite staff recognising that Clodagh had the ability to move her eyes, it was Clodagh's partner who established that Clodagh was still able to understand speech and set up a crude communication method using an agreed number of blinks to communicate yes and no.

However, even though her partner had established a yes/no communication method, staff were still unable to communicate with her effectively as they did not know Clodagh and found it difficult to interpret her attempts. During the next two weeks, Clodagh experienced what she describes as a terrifying ordeal and a fear that her life was at risk because she was unable to communicate. She was unable to convey that she was overheating as her temperature control had been affected by her stroke and she couldn't ask staff to remove her heavy blankets, turn on a fan or get some iced cloths to help cool her down.

Following an assessment two weeks later by a speech and language therapist, Clodagh was given an appropriate communication support, an eye gaze spell board, and staff were advised that Clodagh had full cognitive abilities. Clodagh was finally enabled to express some decisions about her care. Clodagh has stated that 'the communication assessment should have been done the day I woke up'.

THE ECONOMIC BENEFIT

Social return on investment research estimates that:

- Every £1 invested in low intensity speech and language therapy for adults with communication difficulties post stroke generates £1.30 due to the monetary benefit associated with quality of life gain.
- Each £1 invested in low intensity speech and language therapy for adults with dysphagia after stroke generates £2.30 in healthcare cost savings through cases of avoided chest infections.

For further information and a full list of references please contact: