

Person with Aphasia Perspectives of an Aphasia Conversation Group

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Introduction

It is estimated that 20-38% of stroke patients experience aphasia (1). Difficulties communicating can lead to fatigue, decreased quality of life and depression (2,3,4). Living successfully with aphasia has been linked to opportunities to engage in meaningful activities and maintain close relationships.

Aphasia conversation groups (ACGs) are a conversation-oriented therapy that focus on changing behaviours in the context of conversation, increasing the ability of PWA and their family members to manage day-to-day lives (5,6). The group format of an ACG provides social support and facilitates the transfer of communication skills into everyday life (7,8).

Little is known about how PWA perceive benefits of their participation in ACGs as well as perceptions regarding limitations and ways to improve ACGs.

Objectives

We conducted a quantitative evaluation of two related ACGs to:

1. Explore the benefits, limitations and ways to improve two ACGs from the perspectives of PWA attending the group
2. Support and inform the development of other ACGs in the region.

Methods

Participants attending one of two publicly funded ACGs offered by the same service provider were purposively sampled and asked to take part in a structured interview.

Population

Inclusion Criteria:

1. Be experiencing aphasia (any type)
2. Have participated in one of the selected ACGs.

All PWA attending the groups in the spring of 2018 were invited to participate. Ten out of 14 people agreed to take part in the study. Individual interviews with PWA were conducted one week following the 8-week ACGs offered in the South East Local Health Integration Network. Researchers were assisted in providing supportive conversation by a SLP not involved in the person's care.

Structured Interviews

Twelve structured questions were asked regarding the following:

- Satisfaction levels
- Group organization: size, frequency, and structure
- Perceived benefits

Interview questions were structured as either a 5-point Likert Scale or Select all that Apply. PWA were given the opportunity to provide additional information following each question.

___ I wanted to improve my ability to speak
___ I wanted to learn new strategies to communicate
___ I wanted to practice communicating using skills that I had
___ I wanted to get together with people who had similar problems
___ It gave me something to do
___ My family wanted me to come
___ Other

1 2 3 4 5
No maybe probably yes absolutely

Aphasia Conversation Groups

The two ACGs consisted of regular meetings of up to 7 PWA from the community. The goals of the groups were to increase confidence for conversation and to improve conversations skills through a) aphasia education, b) structured small and large group discussion of topics of interest (current events, vacation plans, sharing personal stories, going through menus and practicing ordering), and c) promoting advocacy through participation in a local event to provide public education on aphasia. The group was facilitated by a Speech Language Pathologist and an assistant.

One group was designed for people whose abilities to communicate are significantly impacted and the other for those whose abilities are mild to moderately impacted.

Findings

PWA Participant Demographics

	Mean (Range)
Age	68.7 (35-89)
Years Post Stroke	6.73 (1-32)
N	
Gender	
Male	6
Female	4
Mobility Status	
Walk Without Aid	5
Walk With Cane/Walker	3
Walk With Cane/Walker and uses Wheelchair	2
Living Situation	
Lives with spouse	6
Lives with spouse and children	2
Lives with parent	1
Lives with children	1

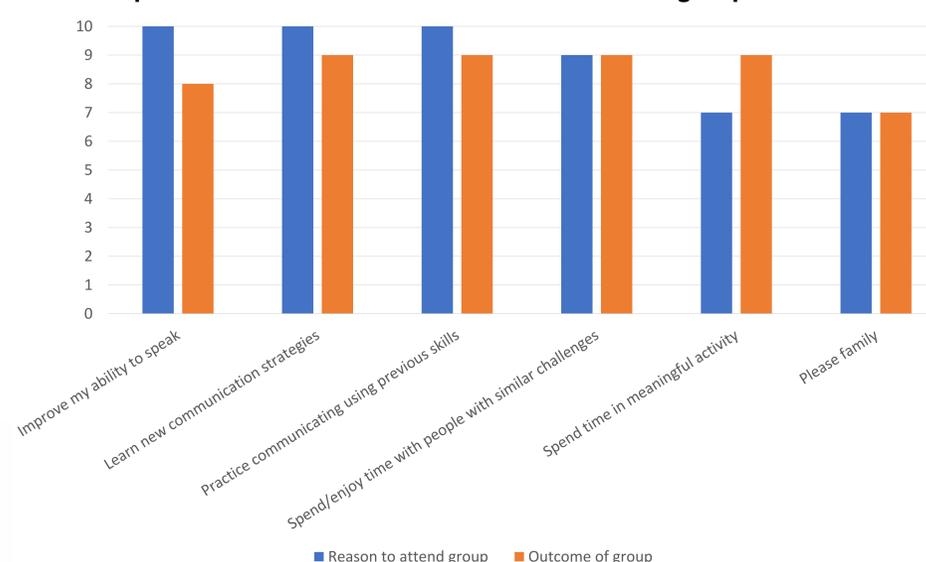
Key Themes:

- Increased confidence
- Increased independence and social skills
- Building Advocacy Skills
- Peer Support

Overall:

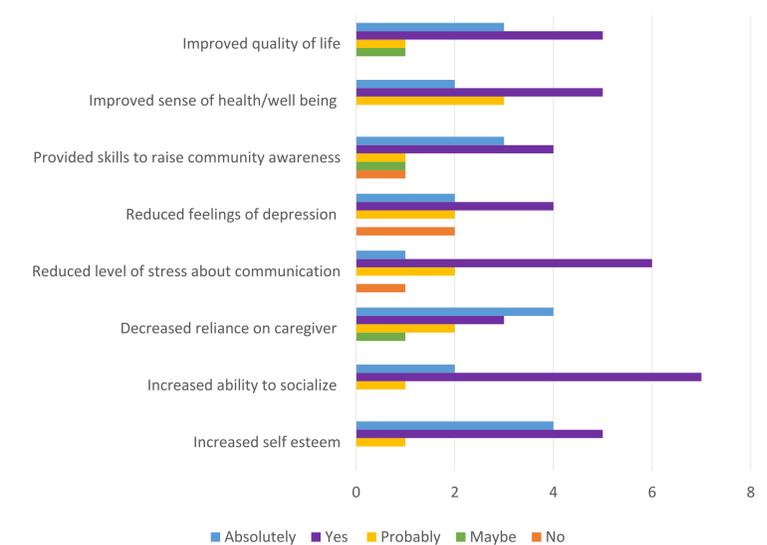
- All PWA indicated that they felt connected with other ACG members and they would all like to come back for another 8-week program.
- Preferences varied with regards to the size, frequency and structure of the group.
- Increased opportunity for leadership roles was suggested.

PWA reported reasons to attend vs. outcomes of the groups



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PWA reported outcomes of the aphasia conversation groups



Discussion

PWA found the ACG helped promote confidence in their communication abilities. There was also a strong indication of feeling supported; all PWA in this study reported feeling connected to other group members and that their communication needs could be understood.

Findings align with the current literature supporting the benefits of group therapy in that participants expressed the elements of a group format and social support were critical positive outcomes.

There was lack of agreement among participants as to the ideal structure (size, frequency, activity format) of the groups. However, ACGs that involve multimodal communication activities can improve members' social networks and friendships (8).

Participants appreciated opportunities for leadership within the group. Enhancing leadership opportunities may further enhance confidence and contribute to the overall sense of peer support within the group. Persons living with aphasia can gain increased self-confidence and self-worth through peer mentorship involved in the aphasia rehabilitation (9).

Conclusions

- This study contributes to the body of evidence supporting the benefits of ACGs to increase communication skills and confidence for social interaction.
- Findings highlight the need to incorporate the perspectives of PWA to further examine the important components of ACGs and how they contribute to communication skills. As well, there is a need to examine the long-term impacts of ACGs.

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