

How acceptable are Aphasia iCafé student-led online social support groups?

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Background

- COVID accelerated use of telehealth in Speech and Language Therapy
- Telehealth has advantages – improved access, more cost-effective, clients generally satisfied
- However communication and/or cognitive difficulties can make it difficult to access technology (RCSLT, 2020)
- Aphasia groups improve QoL, impairment, participation (Attard et al, 2018)
- Few studies about online aphasia groups and about student-led groups.

Aphasia iCafe

🕒 1 hour per week

👥 5-6 members per group, 2 student facilitators

📺 Students run 10-16 sessions; members ongoing

👤 Student peer support within and between blocks

📖 Practice Educator support before and during placement

💬 Content included conversation and activities such as quizzes; planned collaboratively

Methods

Qualitative study – in-depth interviews via Zoom

- 8 students
- 8 people with aphasia/dysarthria
- Framework analysis used



Students set up an online group for people with aphasia and dysarthria. It grew into 7 weekly groups run year-round.

“it was an online placement where we were really involved... to be thrown in the deep end and say right here's your group, off you go, ..as scary as it was, it was really quite empowering” (S3)

“I just feel like they are family” (P2)

Findings

Advantages of online groups	Disadvantages of online groups
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Structured activities provided opportunities to improve communication skills • Inclusive • Resources ‘at your fingertips’ • Gaining new skills • Being able to see names and who’s talking 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduced spontaneity • Missed informal chats and physical presence • Minor technical barriers • Managing turn-taking and silences
Other themes <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Impact of taking part - improved mood and motivation, sharing strategies and learning from each other • PwA very positive about students. • Students talked about the privilege of getting to know PwA. • Developing as a student clinician – peer support and autonomy 	

Clinical implications

- Student-led online social support groups were acceptable and beneficial
- Online groups are more feasible now as technology improves.
- They offer excellent opportunities as clinical placements for students to learn about aphasia/dysarthria.