A teaching model to improve nursing assistants’ knowledge of aphasia and communication strategies

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Introduction

Access to quality health care depends on clear communication between healthcare providers and patients. Barriers caused by aphasia often make communication between healthcare providers and patients difficult.

Demonstrated Need

It is common for people with aphasia (PWA) in hospitals, nursing homes, and receiving home care to rely on nursing assistants (NAs) for much of their everyday health and personal care.

There have been studies of:

- Training nurses and NAs to communicate with people who have dementia (Baker, Benitez, & Allen, 2012; McFallan, Toolland, Leary, & Banks, 1999)
- Training volunteers to communicate with PWA (Kogan, 1998; Hickey, Bourgeois, & Oleson, 2004)

To our knowledge, we have studied programs that targeted teaching NAs about aphasia and communication.

Support for Patient as Teacher

Recent studies have demonstrated the benefits of including patients in the training of healthcare personnel. Reports show that an approach has been successful:

- In medical schools with geriatric mentors for medical students (Toseland, Lacey, & Banks, 1999)
- In ambulatory clinics where people with HIV teach medical students (Vol. Nahorn-Salzer, Morrison, & Kael, 1996)
- Pre-service physical therapy programs where people who have a stroke teach physical therapy students (Owens, Demas, Ellis-Edwards, & Greenyer, 2000)
- In graduate speech-language pathology programs where PWA teach communication strategies to student clinicians (Duett, Patterson, & U, 2008)

Hypothesis: Attending a presentation about aphasia and communication that includes the first person perspective from PWA will improve NA students’ knowledge of aphasia, equip them with tools to facilitate communication, and offer insight into the disorder.

Methods

Program

- Collaboration between the Adler Aphasia Center and Bergen Community College’s NA training program.
- 75-minute presentation on aphasia and communication delivered by one SLP and one PWA.

Presentation:

- Basic information about aphasia (definition, characteristics, causes).
- First-hand accounts of PWA’s experiences with aphasia.
- Communication tips and strategies based on Supported Conversation for Adults with Aphasia™ (Kogan, 1998).
- First-person narratives, group discussion, videotaped examples, and questions/answers.

Participants

- Students enrolled in a certified nursing assistant training program at Bergen Community College, Paramus, NJ.
- A total of 195 students across 19 different presentations conducted between July 2008 and April 2010.
- Different PWA from weekly Aphasia Advocacy or Education & Training groups at the Adler Aphasia Center served as co-instructors.

Data Collection

- NA students completed:
  - Brief pre- and post-presentation surveys that included 4 true/false statements assessing knowledge about aphasia.
  - A program evaluation with five statements about the presentation to be rated on a 5-point Likert scale.
  - Interviews were recorded and transcribed.
  - First and second authors reviewed the transcripts and identified trends across responses.

Results

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Pretest % correct</th>
<th>Posttest % correct</th>
<th>Improvement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I have an idea of at least two things I can do when talking with a person with aphasia</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>192</td>
<td>85.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have a better understanding of what aphasia is</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>148</td>
<td>14.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can see why it is difficult for them to say what they mean</td>
<td>135</td>
<td>153</td>
<td>13.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I still incorporate elements from my training when working with a CNA</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>4.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Pretest % correct</th>
<th>Posttest % correct</th>
<th>Improvement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Do you think your understanding of aphasia was enhanced by the presentation?</td>
<td>193</td>
<td>199</td>
<td>0.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Would you recommend this program to other students?</td>
<td>141</td>
<td>162</td>
<td>15.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If you were a PWA, in what ways do you think you could help the student?</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>141</td>
<td>13.6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Discussion

Comparison of pre- and post-data indicates that NA students demonstrated increased knowledge about aphasia and communication when a 75-minute program co-presented by a PWA and an SLP was included as part of their classroom curriculum.

This preliminary study suggests that explicit aphasia and communication training delivered in this format has positive learning outcomes for NA students.

Results suggest that teaching NA students about aphasia and communication in the classroom in a format that includes the first person perspectives of PWA is a viable training option that may be easily implemented with a number of professional and paraprofessional groups.

Additionally, there appears to be psychosocial benefits for PWA who serve as co-instructors. They reported positive experiences and personal gratification as a result of their participation in this program.

Further analysis of the NA students self reported learning outcomes and comments on the program is warranted.

Follow-up investigation is warranted to assess knowledge retention and generalization of knowledge into “real world” interactions between NAs and PWA.

Future studies should attempt to determine which aspect of the session is most beneficial to students, compare this program to other types of intervention, and further explore psychosocial benefits to participants.

References


