

Assessment and Therapy for Language and Cognitive Communication Difficulties in Dementia and Other Progressive Diseases

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This text offers a good overview of current research and its practical application to the assessment, treatment and management of language and cognitive communication difficulties. Its publication is timely, given the growing international focus on the dementias and the structured and systematic way information is presented lends itself to readers of all levels of clinical experience.

In this text the author, a practicing highly specialist speech and language therapist, offers the reader her clinical experience of working with individuals with language and communication disorders and progressive diseases such as dementia, which she then evidences and/or challenges with up to date research. She demonstrates how these are applied in a clinical setting and guides the reader to further sources of relevant information.

The nine chapters of the text guide the reader through the patient journey from assessment, treatment, therapy, management and maintenance, to review and discharge. Additional chapters are dedicated to areas that can be of particular challenge for clinicians working with individuals with progressive conditions and conditions affecting cognition, such as outcome measures and the role of the speech and language therapist (SLT) in decision making and capacity work within this clinical population.

Each technique or approach is reported concisely, underpinned by a section informing the reader of the evidence base for the approach. This style of information presentation features throughout the book and allows the reader to quickly achieve a 'good enough' overview and references enabling the clinician to research methods further where desired.

The standard overview of epidemiological information sets the scene for a discussion of the more common variants of dementia, and some other progressive neurological conditions affecting language and communication. This is followed by a short overview of historical service delivery models for SLTs working with these populations.

The chapter on assessment is particularly comprehensive: presenting a variety of formal and informal methods and a short description of the approach, the practical challenges of assessing this clinical population are also discussed. Differential diagnosis is discussed in the context of the SLT role and the author provides a useful table, summarising the language features associated with different dementia types.

The need for treatment planning and goal setting collaboratively with patients and their families is presented in chapter two, with recognition of the challenges that this can bring when working with differing levels of understanding and expectation. Different methods of service

delivery are presented in the section on therapy and management. Topics for presentation and discussion include individual, group and carer/ conversation partner interventions and the presenting the benefits and challenges of each. Existing approaches from non-progressive communication disorders are also offered for discussion as potentially viable for consideration for individuals with language and cognitive communication difficulties in dementia and other progressive diseases.

Complex ethical challenges are confronted in the chapter on mental capacity and the role of SLT. A historical perspective of mental capacity and the development of the mental capacity act is presented initially followed by examples of the different types of capacity decisions that may arise in working with this client group. The SLT's role in supporting the work of other clinicians in the process is acknowledged as is the realisation that in some cases the SLT may be leading the decision making process. Case studies demonstrate how complicated the process can be, and where the SLT role can support.

The importance of outcome measurement is highlighted, and the lack of specific outcome measurement tools for the clinical population acknowledged. The author presents existing tools and discusses their application to dementia, concluding that however the clinician chooses to gather this information, it is of vital importance that clinical work is measured in order to demonstrate change and the value added by providing speech and language therapy services for patients with language and cognitive communication disorders. The author discusses the need for throughput in the clinical caseload and recognises that discharge decisions are not always easy within a population where changes and deterioration in language, communication and cognitive skill are inevitable. She reiterates the usefulness of outcome measures in determining discharge.

Although research is not always abundant in this developing area of SLT practice, the author models how clinicians can and should look to other areas of SLT to support their clinical practice.

A distinct strength of this book is the way the author addresses the fear felt by even the most experienced of clinicians when starting to work with a new and developing client group whose conditions are progressive. Throughout the book the clinical and terminological confusions that arise and distance clinicians are addressed openly and accessibly.

This text covers a breadth of information for the working clinician and signposts to sources of greater detail. Information is presented in a variety of formats; tables, case studies and practical examples which serves to engage the reader and maintain interest and cater for different learning styles.

Anna Volkmer successfully manages to describe and update clinicians on approaches to assessment, intervention and management whilst acknowledging the challenges faced whilst operating in the context of the middle context between impairment based and functional models of dementia.

She informs of the need for consideration and application of approaches developed in other clinical populations to that of the dementia client group, where approaches may be lacking or in their infancy in language and cognitive communication disorders.

This text presents adequate information about variety of assessments and approaches to therapy and management, and is descriptive rather than prescriptive. It encourages clinicians to reach their own decisions and signposts sources of more detailed information. The honesty

with which the author acknowledges areas of confusion and challenge for clinicians working with this client group is refreshing and will give permission for clinicians to be equally candid.

In summary this text provides an excellent source of information for clinicians who are relatively new to the field of dementia, and a solid overview and update for clinicians who may be at a point to review/redesign the SLT service they provide to individuals with dementia and other progressive conditions.

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