BAS Conference Support report; International Aphasia Rehabilitation Conference, The Hague

Rose Hilton

It was a privilege to have 3 days of total aphasia immersion thanks to the BAS Conference Support Fund. The organising committee had done a great job in delivering a large conference with a relaxed atmosphere. The Haguewas a beautiful “village” to explore, even in the midst of World Football, with a surprisingly extensive seaside, as well as the Royal Palace, the International Court and canals and bikes galore. The main messages I took away from IARC were rigour, collaboration including involvement of service users in research, and technological applications.

Marian Brady focussed on research rigour in gathering, and fully reporting, aphasia data so as to be able to meet stringent requirements of systematic reviews. Nina Simmons Mackie commented on the need to apply the same rigour to more “qualitative” areas such as studies of supportive conversation training, which rarely meet review requirements due to the choice of outcome measures and incomplete reporting. Jacqueline Hinckley introduced us to Aphasia United (www.aphasiaunited.org), a global collaboration of stakeholders to identify best practice, set the international research agenda and provide a conduit to bring aphasia to the “top table” of disability research. Drawing on other disciplines to strengthen the theoretical basis of our research and therapy was another recurring theme, including better awareness of limb apraxias (Goldenberg) and linguistic models of sentence complexity (Bastiaanse.)

Marian Brady advocated pooling data, rationalising our multiple outcome measures and engaging in collaborative studies. The CATS project Collaboration of Aphasia Triallists enables unpublished research that meets minimum requirements to be added to the bigger research picture ([www.aphasiatrials.org](http://www.aphasiatrials.org)). Sharing knowledge can help us achieve strong research evidence for people with aphasia more quickly. Other presenters including Nina Simmons Mackie, Erin Godecke, Sarah Wallace and Gerard Ribbers also strongly advocated development of a core outcome set (COS) for comparative effectiveness research, allowing useful comparisons of studies and as a prerequisite for collaborative working. COS needs to demonstrate real life outcomes to attract funding (Ribbers), and be rooted in the real life priorities of people affected by aphasia. For example, Sarah Wallace used the nominal group technique to ascertain priorities in outcome measures comparing people with aphasia and their families. Jacqueline Hinckley gave us a model of levels of engagement in research involvement from participant to research leader and described using the nominal group technique to access the research priorities of people with chronic aphasia.

Application of technology in aphasia rehabilitation ranged from specialist equipment for direct brain stimulation, monitoring eye movement or counting quantity of speech in real life, to remote therapy via existing apps and a survey of everyday technology use. It is clear that transferable research from neurophysiology is increasingly feeding into aphasia rehabilitation, but also that there is a wealth of readily accessible and often familiar technology we can co-opt for better therapy delivery or better access to the digital world we all use. Blogs and other media also featured amongst over 70 posters displayed. There was some interesting preliminary work including projects to measure or increase participation and other aspects of longer term support, communication partner training and the needs of relatives. Sadly, the abstracts for the posters were not available during the conference, but this did have the benefit of encouraging delegates to find time to scan their content and if possible talk to their authors.