

What is the therapeutic alliance and can we measure it?

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The therapeutic alliance encapsulates a “variety of therapist-client interactional and relational factors operating in the delivery of treatment” (Green, 2006 p426). The development of a positive therapeutic alliance has been shown to be a strong determinant of treatment outcome in psychotherapy (Horvath, Del Re, Flückiger & Symonds, 2011) and evidence is emerging from a range of healthcare and medical disciplines to suggest that this construct may in fact be a variable component of treatment outcome, adherence and satisfaction (Hall et al., 2010; Lakke & Meerman, 2016). The therapeutic alliance appears to be particularly relevant to aphasia rehabilitation, precisely because the act of communication cannot be separated from personhood and social connection. However, this concept has yet to be applied to the field of aphasia rehabilitation. Relational and interactional aspects of therapeutic interventions are perceived to be central to optimising therapeutic efficacy and treatment engagement in aphasia rehabilitation (Fourie, 2009; McLellan, McCann, Worrall & Harwood, 2014; Worrall et al., 2010). Findings suggest that effective alliances are perceived to: inculcate hope (Worrall, 2010); enhance patient motivation (Lawton, Haddock, Conroy & Sage, 2016); foster psycho-social well-being (Fourie, 2009); influence satisfaction; and, differentially affect linguistic-communication treatment outcomes (McLellan et al., 2014). Therefore, it is essential to understand how therapeutic alliances are constructed in aphasia rehabilitation in order to develop a theory-driven measure of the therapeutic alliance, which can then be used to determine whether a positive therapeutic alliance contributes to treatment success.

This presentation will report on the findings from two empirical interview-based studies exploring how speech and language therapists and people with aphasia develop and maintain therapeutic alliances. Following which, this keynote will present the results of a Q methodology study which will explore which aspects of the therapeutic alliance are valued by people with aphasia. Implications for clinical practice and training will subsequently be discussed. The latter part of the presentation will describe the development of the Aphasia and Stroke Therapeutic Alliance Measure (A-STAM) and provide evidence of its psychometric properties.

References: Fourie, R. J. (2009). Qualitative study of the therapeutic relationship in speech and language therapy: Perspectives of adults with acquired communication and swallowing disorders. *International Journal of Language & Communication Disorders*, 44(6), 979-999. Green, J. (2006). Annotation: The therapeutic alliance - a significant but neglected variable in child mental health treatment studies. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 47(5), 425-435. doi:10.1111/j.1469-7610.2005.01516.x. Hall, A. M., Ferreira, P. H., Maher, C. G., Latimer, J., & Ferreira, M. L. (2010). The Influence of the Therapist-Patient Relationship on Treatment Outcome in Physical Rehabilitation: A Systematic Review. *Physical therapy*, 90(8), 1099-1110. doi:10.2522/ptj.20090245. Horvath, A. O., Del Re, A., Flückiger, C., & Symonds, D. (2011). Alliance in individual psychotherapy. *Psychotherapy*, 48(1), 9. Lakke, S. E., & Meerman, S. (2016). Does working alliance have an influence on pain and physical functioning in patients with chronic musculoskeletal pain; a systematic review. *Journal of Compassionate Health Care*, 3(1), 1. Lawton, H. M., Haddock, G., Conroy, P., & Sage, K. (2016). Therapeutic alliances in stroke rehabilitation: A meta-ethnography. *Archives of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation*. Worrall, L., Davidson, B., Hersh, D., Ferguson, A., Howe, T., & Sherratt, S. (2010). The evidence for relationship-centred practice in aphasia rehabilitation. *Journal of Interactional Research in Communication Disorders*, 1(2), 277-300.