On this past July 6th, there was a special event.

Why? Because it was important in several directions.

Students in the Speech and Hearing Department gain because of this outreach. They are exposed to a broader group of people with these communication disabilities, in a unique collection of people needing support, and in a way to thoughtfully identify them from a diverse group.

People supporting the survivors (caregivers) need support themselves. The gathering was intended to bring both sides of the need together.

This Newsletter started as a therapy aimed at one member of our group, by providing a way to practice writing. It has grown (fitfully?) beyond that. In its search, it hopes to speak to a broader community of people feeling a need in communication problems.

This issue attempts to tell what happened there.

About sixty people attended the meeting in the UW Bothell campus.

After sign-in and Continental Breakfast, Nancy Alarcon gave a welcome to all, identified the goals of the meeting and clarified the ground rules (Who, What, and Where?).

Two people then provided their perspectives on this type of gathering: John Pavlish, had a stroke at college, survived it, and graduated. Julie Bacon, caregiver, shared her story (Issue #34 included Julie’s article, “A REAL Handful” and she will soon have a follow-up article).

Exercise to “get to know those at the table”, share other’s difficulties,

Break/Tour Exhibits

Presentations (summarized):

The Plastic Brain

Staying Healthy After Stroke

Lunch:

At lunch, there was music for singing, dancing and relaxing.

And at both breaks, there were tables of information about what was being done for and about aphasia and exhibitors to describe and explain their items and to answer questions from the retreat attendees.

Exhibitors/Contributors:

Lingraphica, from Princeton, NJ, Dr. Steele explained a speech generating device. (www.aphasia.com)

Lisa Alison and Don Baragiano, provided music and enjoyment at lunch. (www.letyourmusicshine.com)

ElderHealth Northwest. Lindsey Ismailova described their Kent/Snohomish day centers and supported living homes. (www.elderhealth.org)


Visiting Angels. Homecare living assistance. (www.visitingangels.com)

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The Plastic Brain
by Diane L. Kendall, PhD
Associate Professor
University of Washington

Recent advances in neurosciences indicate that indeed the brain can adapt or change as a result of experience and practice. This adaptation is called “plasticity”.

The current research data suggest that neurons, among other brain cells, possess a remarkable ability to change their structure and function as a result of a variety of experiences. Such ‘experiences’ are called: principles of experience-dependent plasticity.

Three of the principles are reviewed here. For more information, see Kleim & Jones (2008).

1. **Use it or lose it**: Failure to use brain function and lead to functional degradation. In other words, use your brain! Use your arm! Use your leg! The more you use these functions; you will at the very least ‘maintain’ what you have.

2. **Use it and improve it**: Training that drives a specific brain function can lead to enhancement of that function. In other words, the more you use your brain the BETTER it will become. So go to therapy, to family functions, talk with people, get out in the community. Use your brain! It will get better.

3. **Repetition matters**: Induction of plasticity requires sufficient repetition. In other words, the more you talk, the better your brain will become. If you are engaged in therapy, the more you repeat the words with your therapist, the better your brain will become.

**Reference:**

Staying Healthy After Stroke
by Sara Schepp, MD
Dept. of Neurology
Harborview Medical Center

First, some facts about stroke. It is caused by damage to the brain from insufficient blood flow. There are two kinds of stroke.

The most common (about 85% of all strokes) are ischemic stroke due to blockage of blood flow. This can be caused by narrowing of the blood vessels going to the brain or from blood clots that travel from the heart to the brain.

The remainder of strokes are hemorrhagic strokes. They are due to bleeding inside the brain and can be caused by abnormalities of the blood vessels or the blood’s ability to clot effectively.

795,000 strokes happen every year in the US. It is the third leading cause of death in the US (behind heart disease and cancer). It is the number one cause of disability in the US.

Things that increase a person’s risk for stroke are: older age, family history of stroke, previous stroke, high blood pressure, diabetes, smoking, high cholesterol, heart disease, and obesity.

The way we treat stroke has changed dramatically in the last few years. For example, we now have “clot busting” medications and other treatments that can help improve a person’s chances of recovery.

These medications must be given right away, so we now urge people to seek medical care immediately if they suspect a stroke.

The warning signs are any sort of:
- **sudden changes in vision,**
- **changes in speech,**
- **problems with balance or coordination,**
- weakness, or
- numbness.

Once you’ve had a stroke, you CAN improve. There are some things that you can do to help get better and stay healthy after stroke.

**Prevent Further Stroke.** Work with your doctor to control the things you can to reduce your risk of future stroke.

**Eat a Healthy Diet.** Moderation is key, along with fresh fruits and vegetable, whole grains, and lean meat and dairy.

**Stay Active.** Try to build some kind of physical exercise into your routine.

**Stop Smoking.** Talk to your doctor about some of the resources available to help you quit.

**Find New Ways to Have Fun.** The stroke may have made it hard for you to do the things you used to enjoy. Be creative and look for new ways to enjoy yourself.

**Recognize and Get Help for Depression.** As many as one third of people get depressed after stroke. If you think you could be depressed, talk to your doctor.

**Reduce Stress.** Recovery from stroke is hard work and often frustrating. Remember to take breaks and get plenty of rest.

**Interact With Others.** Regular successful communication with others is important, and aphasia groups can be a great way to do this.

**Help Your Doctor Help You.** Prepare for your visits to the doctor in advance. Write down your questions and concerns ahead of time and keep an up-to-date list of all your medications.

**Remember that Caregivers Need Care Too.** Stroke affects the entire family. Loved ones need to take care of their own health needs and stress levels as well.

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**Starbucks on the Ave.** Donations by Dan Kelley-Peterson, Mgr. (www.starbucks.com)

**Photographs.** Ron Bush, photographer & survivor.

**Paintings and other art.** Kelly Maunsell, artist & survivor.

**Aphasia Research Laboratory.** UW Aphasia Registry & Repository, Drs. Diane Kendall and JoAnn Silkes. (dkendall@u.washington.edu)

**Audiology Clinic.** Martha Harney, CCC-A.

"In Search Of . . .) Aphasia Newsletter. Ted Paluchowski.

**UW Google Caregivers Group.** Lindsey Sprinkle & Molly Unwin.

**Break Out Sessions (2):**

These sessions took an hour and a half, one for the survivors, the other for the caregivers.

**The survivor session,** led by Jennifer Kerr and Nancy Alarcon, shared the challenges and strategies of the impact of Aphasia. There were video clips from “Picturing Aphasia”, followed by table group discussions of the videos and how each were affected. The tables then presented their feelings to the group, with a general discussion about how survivors get back into the “Game of Life”.

Active presentation by survivor then showed how each had made solid progress and how that could be helpful improvement to other attendees.

Charlie demonstrated his knitting, and Kelly showed her art. Both of these showed the
talents yielded worth-while products.
Tony, with Ron, showed how Skype works. This now gives people with communications problems a chance to help the spoken conversation along because of a view of the other person’s facial expressions.
Todd then had “Dragon Naturally Speaking” record his voice, without having to write his words down.

The Caregiver session, led by Diane Kendall and Katherine Hanson, was to encourage the caregivers to open up and share the emotional impact of their care-giving involvement.
After this, they were to discuss ways to develop coping strategies and realistic expectations and avoid burnout.

Comments/Suggestions from Attendees:
“The session was good, uncovered a gold mine of feelings, but stopped much too soon. Would be very worth-while to try again, and give more time.”
“One of my patients was feeling apprehensive about moving her therapy to your clinic. She and her daughter had a positive experience and I think it will be much easier. Excellent idea, hopefully an annual event.”
“Understanding information for stroke survivor was difficult because of receptive aphasia.”
“More info for caregivers.”
“Excellent. However, too noise when all were talking to groups.”
“Great to have people share their talents. Exhibits were great. Lunch was good. Music great. Set a nice tone. Very well organized. Level of info—too high?”
“Both Drs. spoke slowly and clearly rather than trying to simplify.”

“Caregivers better served if more interaction. Maybe learn how others manage taking care of themselves rather than ‘planting a seed’.”

Support Group Resources:
UW Stroke & Head Injury Caregiver Support Group
It is for caregivers of any age or relation to the stroke/head injury person.
Meetings are:
- Every Saturday
- From 12 pm—2 pm
- At the UW Speech & Hearing Clinic 4131—15th Ave NE, Seattle, 98105
- Exception: Every 3rd Saturday of each month, meeting is held at the NW Hospital from 1-3 pm, in collaboration with the Young Adult Stroke Survivor Group (1550 North 115th Street, Seattle, 98133). On the Web at: seattleyass.weebly.com
- UW student volunteers will provide there:
  - childcare in one room;
  - patient care (for your survivor) in a separate room.
- Stay up-to-date by joining the Stroke & Head Injury Caregiver Google Group, at: groups.google.com/group/uwcaregivers

TACOMA Stroke Support Group
For survivors and caregivers. Come and share your ideas and experiences. Join us on September 23rd for our next meeting at the:
TACID Building
6315 South 19th
Tacoma, WA
www.tcid.org for directions and a map.