

(wife of stroke survivor)

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Submission to Senate enquiry into Prevalence of different types of speech, language and communication disorders and speech pathology services in Australia

My husband [REDACTED] had a severe stroke while undergoing an angiogram in November 2000. It affected his right side movement and his speech was almost non-existent.

He had been a very outgoing man, a Scotsman with a great sense of humour and a real storyteller. He could understand language but lost the ability to form words and this caused extreme frustration and some depression.

To begin with he lost many of his friends many of whom did not know how to react.

He spent three months in rehab. A speech therapist worked with him with limited success at first as he was probably not in the right frame of mind to accept help. Later however he worked with a therapist at Villa Maria who was able to get through to him, make him laugh and give him hope. I believe that once a week was probably not enough for him. From then he started communicating in Aphasia groups and in choir activity led by speech therapists.

His speech, although still limited, continued to improve with encouragement over the next twelve years until he died in 2012.

Recommendations

Compared to other therapies such as occupational and physio, speech therapy was very difficult to find. For people with aphasia, communication and language is their greatest loss and speech therapy should be as readily available as therapies that work on physical improvement.

People with aphasia continue to show changes over the years but most services are only available to people up to two years after their stroke. This may be just the time they are beginning to accept their situation and be ready to work with what they've got. There should be no time limit on when services are offered.