The development, feasibility, and effectiveness of an online aphasia group intervention – TeleGAIN

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**Background:** Aphasia is a sudden and life changing communication impairment of any area of speaking, listening, reading and writing. Due to the fundamental importance of communication, disruption of these abilities typically has a pervasive impact on activities of daily life, social participation and quality of life. Group therapy for aphasia offers people with aphasia a unique therapeutic environment in which to practice communication, receive support for living with aphasia and expand social networks. However, many service delivery barriers and access challenges present as obstacles for people with aphasia in accessing these face-to-face services. An alternative may be online aphasia groups (telerehabilitation) that emulate this same milieu. Although the technology currently exists to implement these services, no research exists that supports a telerehabilitation group therapy approach.

**Aim:** This study aims to describe the development, feasibility and implementation pilot of an aphasia group therapy treatment program.

**Method:** The UK Medical Research Council (MRC) framework for complex interventions was used to guide the development of a twelve week aphasia group therapy intervention to be delivered via the internet. The overall goals of therapy were to 1) create communication opportunities, 2) share personal life history, and 3) provide support for living with aphasia. Nineteen people with chronic aphasia participated in the study. Pre- and post- responses on the Assessment for Living with Aphasia (ALA) and Comprehensive Aphasia Test (CAT) were analysed using a paired \( t \) test. Qualitative analysis of semi-structured interviews with participants and their communication partners was also carried out.
**Results:** Results revealed a statistically significant increase in communication-related QOL as measured by the ALA and aphasia severity as measured by the CAT. Qualitative analysis of the interviews with participants and their communication partners revealed five themes relating to their experiences and perceptions of TeleGAIN including 1) the group structure and format, 2) experience of telerehabilitation, 3) positive group environment, 4) positive outcomes experienced and 5) satisfaction with TeleGAIN. The central theme that emerged from the analysis was the importance of a positive group environment in facilitating positive outcomes and high satisfaction.

**Conclusion:** The outcomes presented suggest that aphasia group therapy via telerehabilitation is a valuable service delivery method, therapeutic approach, and environmental facilitator, to the management of chronic aphasia.

**Preferred presentation format:** Oral presentation