Aphasia Intervention in Japan: International Innovation and Inspiration

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Introduction

Of Japan’s more than 125 million people, approximately 500,000 are estimated to be living with aphasia. However, due to language and cultural barriers, clinical aphasiologists in English speaking countries have had few opportunities to learn about services being provided to Japanese people with aphasia. Many innovative programs have been developed in Japan that may inspire replication in other countries.

Aphasia Peer Circles

Aphasia assessment and intervention followed a traditional medical model approach in these beginning years. Alongside the traditional rehabilitative services for people with aphasia, a spontaneous volunteer program of “aphasia peer circles” began to develop.

- Aphasia Peer Circles began informally when people with aphasia (PWA) and caregivers began meeting together in private homes and community locations.
- In 1981, a Tokyo Aphasia Peer Circle was formed.
- In 1984, the president of the Tokyo Aphasia Peer Circle founded the Japanese Aphasia Peer Circle Association (JAPC).

The goals of the JAPC include:

- Holding a national conference of aphasia peer circle members.
- Encouraging the creation of additional aphasia peer circles.

There are currently 230 active aphasia peer circles in Japan meeting monthly or bimonthly with a membership of about 8,000 people nationwide.

“Aphasia Live”

- In 1983, the Public Health Act for the Elderly was enacted in Japan.
- This reduced inpatient rehabilitation to 3 months for those with chronic health disorders.
- After the 3 month period, public health nurses were responsible for setting up rehabilitation plans for people with chronic health conditions who returned home.
- In 1985, Takashi Endo, a speech-language pathologist, worked with public health nurses to find funding to pay for speech-language pathology services using the Public Health Act for the Elderly.
- Funding was approved for aphasia conversation classes—these were called “Aphasia Live.”
- Other Aphasia Live groups began across the country.
- In 2000, there were 100 Aphasia Live groups meeting nationwide.

Aphasia Conferences

- National aphasia conferences are held each year in Japan.
- In 2008, the 27th national conference will be held in Fukuoka, Japan.
- Regional conferences are also held each year in various Japanese regions or prefectures.
- These conferences are attended by PWA, family members, and healthcare professionals.
- Educational content is interspersed with lively performances by local entertainers.
- Time is also set aside for participatory activities such as singing and exercises by audience members.

Aphasia Day Centers

- In 2000, the Long Term Care Insurance Act for the Elderly was enacted in Japan.
- This legislation provided funding for people 40 years of age or older with chronic disabilities to attend day programs.
- Inspired by aphasia group treatment programs in the United States (Elman, 1999), Mr. Endo began “Habataki” (“flying high”) an aphasia day center serving 10 PWA each weekday.
- The program occupies a 3 room apartment in a Tokyo suburb.
- Habataki has four paid staff: a social worker, a care worker, and 2 speech-language pathologists, plus volunteers and student interns.
- There are now six aphasia day centers in Japan funded by the Act of Long Term Care.

Aphasia Sheltered Workshops

- In 1985, Takashi Endo, a speech-language pathologist Yoko Tamura and her colleagues began SCA TM training programs for communication partners of PWA in Japan.
- In 2005, they founded a non-profit organization to sustain the program through membership fees and donations.
- SCA™ training programs are currently provided in Tokyo and are also being developed in other major cities in Japan.

Training Programs for Supported Conversation™

- Following a 1999 visit to the Aphasia Institute in Toronto, speech-language pathologist Yoko Tamura and her colleagues began SCA™ training programs for communication partners of PWA in Japan.
- In 2005, they founded a non-profit organization to sustain the program through membership fees and donations.
- These trips provide opportunities to resume foreign travel in an environment that supports both communicative and physical challenges.

Conclusions

- In Japan, aphasia intervention has received inspiration from other parts of the world.
- Japanese programs have received funding through application of government regulations, even though these governmental acts were not originally developed to provide services to people with aphasia.
- A top down approach has been effective—SLPs found creative ways to fit services for PWA into already funded programs.
- Given the potential for healthcare reform and service delivery changes in the United States, clinical aphasiologists may receive timely inspiration from successes in Japan.

Contact Information

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Selected References


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Introduction

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• Aphasia Peer Circles began informally when people with aphasia (PWA) and caregivers began meeting together in private homes and community locations.

At the same time, a more formal social model began to develop among people with aphasia. At the time, there were approximately 5,000 people nationwide with acquired aphasia. Therefore, the Japanese Aphasia Peer Circle Association (JAPC) was established.

The goals of the JAPC include:

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• Regional conferences are also held each year in various Japanese regions or prefectures.
• Time is also set aside for participatory activities such as singing and exercises by audience members.

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Aphasia Day Centers

As the result of this expansion, there are now approximately 12,000 licensed speech-language pathologists practicing in Japan.

• In 1984, the president of the Tokyo Aphasia Peer Circle founded the Japanese Aphasia Peer Circle Association (JAPC).

Aphasia Day Centers

• In 2000, the Long Term Care Insurance Act for the Elderly was enacted in Japan.

This legislation provided funding for people 60 years of age or older with chronic disabilities to attend day programs.

• Inspired by aphasia group treatment programs in the United States (Elman, 1999/2007), Mr. Endo began “Habataki” (“flying high”) an aphasia day center serving 10 PWA each weekday.

• The program occupies a 3-room apartment in a Tokyo suburb.

• Habataki has four paid staff: a social worker, a care worker, and 2 speech-language pathologists, plus volunteers and student interns.

• There are now six aphasia day centers in Japan funded by the Act of Long Term Care.

Aphasia Sheltered Workshops

• In 1983, a sheltered workshop was established for people in their twenties and thirties who were living with aphasia.

• There are currently 6 active workshops for younger people living with acquired aphasia.

• These workshops receive funding from the local government as well as from individual contributors.

International Aphasia Friendship Day

• In 1992, Mr. Endo organized a tour for 60 people, including PWA, family members, and several speech-language pathologists.

• They traveled to London for the first international friendship day.

• Since that time, people from Japan have held 11 other international aphasia friendship days: New York, Stockholm, Sydney, Seoul, Tokyo, Brussels, Hiroshima, the San Francisco Bay Area, Curico (Chile), and Rome.

• International Friendship Days are filled with group activities, talking, singing, and laughter!

• These trips provide opportunities to resume foreign travel in an environment that supports both communicative and physical challenges.

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