



The MedStar NRH Aphasia Clinic is breaking new ground by combining the expertise of a cognitive neurologist and speech-language pathologists in a collaborative approach to aphasia management.

Unique Collaborative Approach to Aphasia Care

A first-of-its-kind clinic at MedStar NRH is breaking new ground by combining the worlds of cognitive neurology and speech-language pathology in a collaborative, holistic approach to the management of aphasia.

Aphasia, which affects more than a million Americans, is a disorder that results from damage to the parts of the brain that control language. It is most often the result of stroke, but aphasia may result from other brain injury or brain tumors. People with aphasia may have difficulty with one or more of the functions that are critical to communication: speaking, listening, reading, and writing.

The clinic brings together the expertise of MedStar NRH speech-language pathologists Denise Frankoff and Brooke Hatfield, who have extensive experience and training in working with people with aphasia, with Peter Turkeltaub, MD, PhD, a nationally recognized cognitive neurologist who specializes in aphasia diagnosis and evaluation.

The clinic is designed for those who have experienced a recent stroke or other injury to the brain and who are having language problems—as well as those who have previously been diagnosed with aphasia and want to improve their communication skills, even years after their illness or injury.

Individualized Neurologic and Communication Assessments

The hallmark of the clinic's approach is its comprehensive language and medical evaluation of each participant. This unique collaborative assessment helps the clinic team pinpoint the precise areas of the brain affected by stroke or brain injury, and characterize the type of aphasia clients are experiencing. The team uses this information to both better understand the individual's problem and make recommendations for additional management options.

Dr. Turkeltaub examines each patient's brain images and medical records to determine the affected systems and the degree of damage that has occurred, as well as identify any other significant physical or emotional health issues that may be

impacting communication—information that is important in developing an individualized treatment plan.

The clinic's speech-language pathologists conduct a comprehensive speech and language evaluation to identify each individual's strengths to be built upon, as well as impairment areas to target through therapy, including the robust program offered at the MedStar National Rehabilitation Network.

To ensure that the person with aphasia is at the center of decision-making, the team meets with each participant to review the results of the evaluation and discuss recommendations and expectations. Together, they develop a fine-tuned management plan for each individual, comprised of multiple cutting edge and evidence-based approaches.

Multiple Approaches to Aphasia Management

Medical Intervention

People who have difficulty initiating speech or finding the right word may be candidates for medication. Patients also have access to the comprehensive rehabilitation services of MedStar NRH, including psychologists, and physical and occupational therapists.

Research Opportunities

Some individuals may be eligible to participate in research, including:

- trials of Transcranial Direct Current Stimulation (tDCS) or Transcranial Magnetic Stimulation (TMS)—non-invasive electrical or magnetic stimulation of the brain—to improve language recovery;
- studies testing new kinds of speech/language therapy, including tele-rehabilitation;
- studies using MRI to examine the brain basis of aphasia recovery;
- studies examining how particular language, reading, or writing problems relate to injury to specific parts of the brain.

Participation in any research is optional and will not impact the care you receive in the Aphasia Clinic.

One-of-a-Kind Mentorship Program

The MedStar NRH Aphasia Mentorship Program matches people living with aphasia with volunteer



mentors who have been through the same experience. The mentors are former patients who have received training by MedStar NRH speech-language pathologists. During an eight-week program, mentors and mentees meet regularly for conversation and friendship that gives patients a safe outlet to share their feelings about what they are experiencing, practice their communication skills—and gain confidence about the future.

Support Groups: The Comeback Club provides support for stroke survivors, family and friends. The newly formed Spanish Language Stroke Support Group provides education and support for stroke survivors and their caregivers whose primary language is Spanish.

Speech-Language Therapy

Therapy focuses on the real-life goals of people affected by aphasia, strengthening daily participation in life activities and social connections, and promoting emotional well-being.

Therapy targets each client's unique language challenges, as well as participation in specialized groups to help clients improve communication skills. These approaches focus on a single goal: to allow clients to return successfully to activities that are important to them, and help them increase their communication confidence.

Groups include:

Communication Strategies Group: Participants practice expressing ideas with other people who have aphasia. In this group people with aphasia learn to use strategies which improve their communication effectiveness.

Computer Lab Group: Participants practice listening, speaking, reading and writing using state-of-the-art computer programs and applications.

Reading Strategies: Participants practice decoding words faster and improving reading comprehension.

Book Group: Participants share the experience of reading by utilizing “reading ramps,” including outlines, simplified text, pictures and auditory support through e-readers or audiotapes.

Motor Speech Group: This group utilizes therapies based on the latest research on motor learning for individuals with apraxia of speech, a condition in which damage to the brain affects the motor planning abilities required for speech.

Dysarthria Group: This group focuses on techniques to improve voice and speech for individuals with dysarthria, a condition in which the muscles of the mouth and face become weak, move slowly, or are not coordinated,, which results in distorted speech.

Additional Services

Augmentative and Alternative Communication Clinic: The clinic team assesses and makes recommendations about the most appropriate augmentative and alternative (AAC) communication device available for patients who require them. The team works closely with vendors to provide a range of AAC devices from communication books and picture communications to computer applications with speech output and a variety of new applications for mobile phones.

Clinic Team

Peter Turkeltaub, MD, PhD, is an assistant professor of neurology and director of the Cognitive Recovery Lab at Georgetown University Medical Center (<http://www9.georgetown.edu/gumc/departments/neurology/crl>). He is a cognitive neurologist and neuroscientist specializing in cutting-edge aphasia research, and on understanding more about the brain's organization for language and other cognitive abilities, how this organization changes in people with brain disorders or injury, and how we can boost recovery.

Denise Frankoff, SLP, is a speech-language pathologist at MedStar NRH who has worked extensively with patients with aphasia and their caregivers. She has published in *Topics in Stroke Rehabilitation*, the use of Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) methods in the management of severe communication disorders.

Brooke Hatfield, SLP, is a speech-language pathologist at MedStar NRH who works extensively with aphasia patients. She is also involved in aphasia research, including a recent investigation of the use of telemedicine in the management of communication disorders.

Information

To schedule an appointment, call the Aphasia Clinic at 202-877-1440.

About MedStar National Rehabilitation Network

Since opening its doors in 1986, MedStar National Rehabilitation Hospital has grown from a single hospital to become MedStar National Rehabilitation Network offering inpatient, day treatment and outpatient services in Washington, DC, Maryland and Northern Virginia. The Network provides comprehensive programs specifically designed to aid in the rehabilitation of individuals recovering from stroke; brain injury; spinal cord injury and disease; cancer; and other neurologic and orthopedic conditions including sports injuries.

MedStar National Rehabilitation Hospital is a private, not-for-profit facility with 137 beds and approximately 2,200 admissions per year located in Northwest Washington, DC. We treat patients from the age of six and up in our pediatric unit—the National Center for Children's Rehabilitation—which is a joint service of MedStar NRH and Children's National Medical Center.

MedStar NRH Rehabilitation Network provides over 300,000 ambulatory visits annually at more than 30 outpatient locations in Washington, DC, Maryland and Northern Virginia.

Consistently ranked by physicians for 17 consecutive years in U.S. News & World Report as one of America's “Best Hospitals” for Rehabilitation, MedStar NRH is fully accredited by The Joint Commission, the Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities (CARF), with CARF accredited specialty programs for spinal cord injury, brain injury and stroke. **For more on MedStar NRH, log on to medstarnrh.org.**