DEBUNKING MYTHS ABOUT AUGMENTATIVE AND ALTERNATIVE COMMUNICATION AND ADULTS WITH IDD

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Introduction

- For adults with IDD who do not speak, the literature recommends that interventions include augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) to improve communication and interactions with others (Snell, Brady, McLean, Ogletree, Siegel, Sylvester, et al., 2010).
- Some adults with IDD exhibit limited functional speech and are often overlooked as candidates for AAC interventions because they do have some speech abilities
- The perception is that they are too old to improve their language and communication skills (Cheslock, Barton-Hulsey, Romski, & Sevcik, 2008).
- In truth, many adults with severe disabilities have been denied access to appropriate communication supports and services limiting the possibility of the development of new skills.
- Because recent research supports that communication interventions have been effective with this population regardless of age these services must be available across the lifespan (Sevcik & Romski, 2016).
- The National Joint Committee on the Communication Needs of Individuals with Severe Disabilities (NJC) is spearheading an initiative to address myths about communication and adults with severe disabilities (NJC, in preparation).

Purpose

The purpose of this poster is to discuss one specific myth – *If you have some speech, you can't benefit from AAC* -- and present evidence to debunk the myth. It includes an opportunity to talk with a parent of an adult with IDD who has a severe expressive language disorder and now successfully uses a speech-generating device to facilitate her communication abilities, independence, career goals, and self-determination.

Debunking the Myth:

If you have some speech, you can't benefit from AAC.

- This myth suggests that speech alone is valued above all forms of communication.
- People often say that adults with IDD do not communicate. Usually that means that the adults are not using speech to communicate.
- **Communication, however, not just speech, must be valued above all else.**
- Communication does not have to be expressed through speech to be legitimate and valued. All people communicate with a combination of forms, not just speech. People may believe that offering AAC will reduce the likelihood that speech will be used. Research evidence supports (Millar, Light, & Schlosser, 2006; Romski & Sevcik, 2005; Romski et al., 2010) the fact that *AAC can enhance speech and is not disruptive to its development or use.*

Case Study

- Cheslock, Barton-Hulsey, Romski, & Sevcik (2008) reported on Jane, a 30-year-old woman with IDD and a severe expressive language disorder who uses a speech-generating device (SGD) as a compensatory strategy to facilitate her communicative abilities, independence, and self-determination.
- They described changes in Jane's communication interactions within home and community contexts as well as increases in her spontaneous communication, commenting, and answering with familiar and unfamiliar communication partners.

AAIDD is a member of the National Joint Committee on the Communication Needs of Individuals with Severe Disabilities. For more information about the NJC: www.asha.org/njc

- They found that the introduction of a SGD, AAC intervention strategies, and communication-partner instruction enhanced Jane's overall communicative abilities and desire to interact with others.
- The "expressive" benefits included increased naming abilities on language testing, increased conversational intelligibility, increased number of words used in conversation, increased ability to take conversational turns, and increased ability to answer questions in conversation.
- The "adaptive" benefits of using a SGD for this participant were evidenced in Jane's increased ability to actively participate in daily household and community activities with a variety of communication partners.

Practice and Community Recommendations

1) Adults with IDD may benefit from services and supports directed toward communication even though they are past the typical window for language and communication development.
2) SGD devices offer an opportunity that opens the world of communication to adults who have a broader range of presenting speech and language characteristics than originally thought.

References

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