

cover story

Speech

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Adler also plans to start groups in Newton and Hamilton.

For aphasia patients, it's a boon just to be in each other's company.

James Caratozzolo, who had five strokes in two years, the first one 11 years ago, travels from Hillsborough to attend the Morristown gathering. He's made great progress in speaking but still mixes up opposites — his/her, north/south, in/out — and sometimes he can call up characteristics of a word but not the whole word, intact.

That situation arose one recent Friday.

"Trump, I'm thinking he's good," says Tim Jackson, an artist and former Morristown councilman, dressed smartly in a bright red T-shirt, beige jacket, and straw hat. "Yes. He tells it like it is."

"So what?" asks Scott Daniels of Rockaway Township, a former architect. "No way, Jose."

"Let's say bor ter," Caratozzolo says, "bor ter."

"Abortion?" Ochoa-Werschulz asks.

"Yes!" exclaims Caratozzolo. All the men around the table smile. She understood what he meant.

"That's for a girl," Caratozzolo says. "Nobody else should have a say. Just like the gun. NRI."

As the conversation unfolds, Ochoa-Werschulz writes some of its key words on a white board that she holds high, for the benefit of those aphasia patients who can best absorb language through reading.

Three types

There are, basically, three types of aphasia, explained Binning, who also works as a volunteer with the American Stroke Association.

"There's expressive aphasia, which is the inability to express yourself, to use spoken language," she said. "There's receptive aphasia, which is the inability to understand what people are saying to you, or what you're reading."

"Then there's global aphasia, which means you have components of both," she added.

Which kind of aphasia a patient gets is dependent in part on what part of the brain his or her stroke affected.

Whether aphasia is reversible depends on several factors, according to Binning. In patients with an acute stroke, in which a vessel is blocked, the vessel can be opened and the aphasia reversed, depending on when they get to the hospital.

"Or maybe there's been a trauma and a blood clot on the brain," Binning explained. "We can reverse the aphasia by removing the problem."

"But, for most patients, aphasia is the result of a stroke and the damage is already done by the time they get to the hospital," she added. "For those patients, you're talking more about speech therapy and whether or not the aphasia is reversible with time."

Most people will get a little better over time, according to Binning. Some will get completely better. Most will fall somewhere along that spectrum.

Daily frustration

Frustration is a hallmark of aphasia, Gomory said, for patients, their caregivers and the general public.

"People with aphasia are intelligent and very capable," he said, "but when you can't communicate, it's impossible for others to know that. If it's known that people with aphasia are thinking, that they're all there, the public will start to look at them differently."

Lingraphica created SmallTalk, a series of 13 free apps to help people practice speaking and

Learn more

- » CAREGIVER GROUP: Aphasia Caregiver Support Group, facilitated by Don Martone, 10 a.m.-noon first and third Fridays, The Morristown and Morris Township Library, www.jfpl.org
- » CAREGIVER GROUP: Aphasia Caregiver Support Group, facilitated by Don Martone, 10 a.m.-noon first and third Wednesdays, Shimon and Sara Birnbaum Jewish Community Center, Bridgewater, starting Sept. 9, www.ssbjcc.org
- » GOVERNMENT INSTITUTE: National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders, www.nidcd.nih.gov/health/voice/pages/aphasia.aspx
- » ORGANIZATION: American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, www.asha.org
- » ORGANIZATION: Aphasia Hope Foundation, www.aphasiahope.org
- » ORGANIZATION: National Aphasia Association, www.aphasia.org
- » PATIENT GROUP: Aphasia Communication Group, Morristown, http://tinyurl.com/q6qm99f
- » PATIENT GROUP: Aphasia Conversation and Support Group, New Providence, http://tinyurl.com/pwmy9rt
- » PRODUCTS: Lingraphica — Products and Apps for Aphasia, Princeton, www.aphasia.com
- » PROGRAM: Opportunity Project Inc., Millburn, www.opportunityproject.org
- » THERAPY CENTER: Speaking of Aphasia, Montclair, www.speakingofaphasia.com
- » THERAPY CENTER: Adler Aphasia Center, West Orange, Maywood, www.adleraphasiacenter.org
- » UNIVERSITY INSTITUTE: Kean University Institute for Adults Living with Communication Disabilities, Union, http://grad.kean.edu/ccd/ialcd

three speech-generating devices of varying sizes from 7 to 13 inches — MiniTalk, TouchTalk, and AllTalk. The devices help patients, particularly in the early phases of their recovery, explained Kate Williams, a company spokeswoman.

A patient, caregiver or Lingraphica support specialist can build a customized page on a device that displays icons, each with a different image, that, when pressed, play back a prerecorded message, such as, "Hi, my name is Jack. I am an aphasia patient. I am here today to meet with Mr. Smith."

According to Gomory, the company also provides patients with cards to carry in their wallets that read: "I have aphasia. I'm not drunk."

"If they're stopped by a police officer, who may assume they're either crazy or drunk," Gomory said, "they immediately flash the card so the officer understands they have a communication disorder. It's a very hard position from which to work."

Sometimes, Caratozzolo organizes lunch trips to restaurants with his

Aphasia Communication Group friends, who collectively read the menu, speak the order to the waiter, and pay the bill.

"We go for lunch. We go for restaurants. We go to our own thing," Caratozzolo said. "A lot of people don't get it. Some people get a little, like the waiter, the waiter. He doesn't kind of get it."

A sense of connection

Don Martone of Chester Township knows firsthand about the frustrations of aphasia from a loved one's point of view. He took care of his wife, an aphasia patient, for years before she died in February.

"There's this person you've known for many, many years and you can't talk to each other anymore," Martone said. "You lose your buddy. The conversations you're used to having now are on a very elementary level, mostly yeses or nos. That's really hard on the caregiver, and it's hard on the patient."

To give back, Martone now heads support groups

for caregivers in Morristown and Bridgewater. (See accompanying box.)

"It helps to talk to someone else who is in the same position," he said, "a person who understands."

Also helpful in connecting to the culture at large is TalkPath News, a Lingraphica free app and website on which aphasia patients can have news stories read to them, slowly, alongside a printed copy of the text, which is highlighted as the reading progresses.

At the group meeting in Morristown, Gomory demonstrated how it works.

"It reads the news for you," he said, "and the best part is, it's free."

The men exchanged glances around the table as they smiled.

"That's good," one said. Then the conversation rolled on to new, different topics. Ochoa-Werschulz ended on an upbeat note.

"It doesn't matter that we have aphasia," she said. "What matters is that we have something to say, and we get it out."

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