

New study shows that Skype may be as effective as traditional face-to-face stroke therapy

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Speech therapy delivered remotely using video chat software applications such as Skype may be as effective as traditional face-to-face therapy, according to new research from City University London.

The study, which is published in the journal *Clinical Rehabilitation*, shows that applications such as Skype or Facetime could augment speech therapy for people who have lost the ability to speak following a stroke, enabling patients to be treated by expert therapists from anywhere in the world.

Speech therapy improves the ability to speak and produce words, but many people with [aphasia](#) - a language impairment caused by stroke - receive insufficient treatment because health services are overstretched. This is a major problem since aphasia can lead to unemployment, depression and social isolation. Also, many patients can't easily attend appointments because of physical disabilities or distance, and there aren't enough therapists to visit everyone at home.

Involving 21 participants with aphasia following left hemisphere stroke, the City University London team – which included researchers from the Division of Language and Communication Science and the Centre for Human-Computer Interaction Design (HCID), along with Homerton University

Hospital, London - conducted a feasibility trial comparing face-to-face and remotely delivered word finding therapy. The participants found the technology easy to use, and the study found that using such applications achieved the same outcomes as traditional therapy. The team now plans to carry out a larger study to evaluate efficacy and cost-effectiveness.

Lead author, Dr Celia Woolf, Director of the City Aphasia Research Clinic in the Division of Language and Communication Science at City University London, said: "Imagine being unable to talk to your family, or even to tell the waiter you want coffee. That's the daily frustration faced by 367,000 people in the UK living with aphasia.

"Our study shows that speech therapy need not be restricted to face-to-face meetings. Video chat apps such as Skype can enable effective therapy to be delivered remotely, and so help people regain the ability to speak, which is so fundamental to our lives. This finding could democratise the delivery of therapy, and make treatment available to individuals who were previously excluded from help."

Stephanie Wilson, a Reader in Human-Computer Interaction at City University London, said: "The potential of technology for delivering therapy to people who have aphasia is huge., The increase in the use of applications such as Skype in recent years can enable far more people to have access to [therapy](#) than was previously possible. As a result, our multidisciplinary approach could help improve outcomes for those affected by aphasia following a stroke."

Provided by City University London

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