A Hotspot for Contemporary SLP Practice: Using the iPad in Therapy with Adults

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Research Summary
The use of technology in speech-language pathology has increased greatly over the past 30 years, especially since technological devices have become smaller, faster, and more reliable. As technology becomes more prevalent in healthcare, as well as within the everyday lives of clients, it becomes necessary to consider the appropriate and effective use of technologies in the work of Speech-Language Pathologists (SLPs). Currently, no research exists examining use of the iPad with adult clients. A large percentage of older adults are not presently familiar with this technology, however, within a few decades, the majority of adults who develop a communication disorder will understand the basic use of this technology. Using the ICF as a framework, this project examined use of the iPad and associated apps to facilitate therapy with adults, and how it can be successfully integrated into speech-language pathology.

Practicing clinicians, along with speech-language pathology students, were involved in two focus groups, where they had the opportunity to discuss the use of iPads and apps in therapy. Some themes that were deliberated included the positive and negative features of the tool, and strategies for selecting, evaluating, and learning to use new apps. The participants also attended learning sessions where a variety of apps were presented, and participants evaluated apps based on previously determined best-practice principles. A key finding from the focus groups was that clinicians wanted more dynamic, interactive, and practical apps. They said there was a need for apps that were more naturalistic, and apps that could be more easily used with a communication partner.

Overall, clinicians feel that the iPad is a viable tool in speech-language pathology, but it is necessary to keep in mind that technology is a supplement to therapy, and does not replace clinicians’ skills and training. Participants emphasized that the most important tool at a clinician’s disposal when selecting apps and using the iPad with a client, is clinical judgment. This information can be helpful for app developers to guide their development of apps to better serve SLPs.

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