

3 Reasons Your Doctor May Tell You There is no Hope

Many families have been stressed by their speech therapist or neurologist telling them some version of “This isn’t going to get better” or “You’ll never talk again”. **Hearing this while recovering from your brain injury or stroke can be devastating.** Even clients with very severe aphasia can understand when someone has dismissed their progress potential.

Some clients have been told not to bother with any more therapy, not to waste their money, and that no amount of therapy was going to make a difference. However, those of us in aphasia rehabilitation or who have lived with aphasia for years know this isn’t true. So, why does this idea persist in health care professionals?

Most doctors see your family during and after the stroke for a brief time. Based on those limited visits, your doctor forms an opinion about you and your recovery potential. The very old guidance about aphasia recovery was that you hit your recovery limit (plateau) 6 months after your injury, but some professionals are still using this outdated information to make decisions. Since you may only see this neurologist once a year, they aren’t likely to notice improvements at these visits. They may never have met someone with aphasia who has made significant improvements.

Secondly, the concept of “progress” and quality of life mean different things to professionals than they do to families with aphasia. The doctor may think that you’re never going to get back to how you were before your stroke, so any “progress” doesn’t count—it’s ‘all or nothing’ thinking. However, **families with aphasia know that each day is a cause for celebration.** If your goal is to order your own coffee and you practice until you do it, that’s progress! **There is almost always a way to progress given time, effort and thought, although that “something” may not be as much as we’d like it to be. Always preserve hope.**

Medical practitioners also don’t have a lot of time to learn about therapies. Aphasia is a subset of general stroke rehabilitation, so the physician may not interact with many individuals with aphasia. The benefits of Intensive aphasia rehabilitation have been around for over 30 years, but your doctor may never have met anyone who’s been through it. They may have seen limited progress from speech therapy services for language skills versus physical and occupational therapies.

Thankfully, not all medical professionals think this way. I’ve encountered far more practitioners who encourage exploration of different therapies and who understand the need for hope and compassion. Remember, if you feel that your medical provider, speech therapist, or other professional is overly negative, dismissive, or just not working out for you, you can get a second opinion or find another healthcare provider. Keep in mind that many providers can be found online now, which may widen your access to other professionals.