

## Reflections of an Alumni on the Impact of COVID – 19

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This COVID-19 pandemic has brought about a lot of change and as an acute speech therapist I have noticed the increased need for augmented input in hospitals. Due to barriers such as masks, an oral-peripheral examination for a patient who is dependent on visual cues is impossible without videos. Or key words and gestures are needed for persons with hearing impairment as they are experiencing more difficulty than usual to hear you through masks and visors.

I have experienced a larger scale buy-in for the use of communication boards due to the increase of ventilated patients in our wards. This has resulted in a rise in speech therapy referrals for short-term or temporary communication needs, and nurses, doctors and other therapists stopping me in the hallways to ask for more copies of simple communication boards. These small victories for patients who require AAC (albeit temporarily) culminated in the referral of one specific ventilated patient with acute quadriplegia to me.

She was unable to point or gesture and the basic communication boards were ineffective for her and the alphabet boards took quite long to spell out a simple need. So, I decided to make her a communication booklet with coded messages. It was ring-bound and simple, but the communication that it elicited was anything but basic. The first thing she told me via partner scanning was: “You are terrible at lip reading” and then proceeded to tell me what I needed to add to the booklet.

Suddenly a conversation with family members, who were unable to visit due to Covid-19 guidelines, was a possibility. She no longer had to just listen to the other person on the phone but was able to answer and ask questions with the help of a communication partner following her cues and being her voice. I organized to see her with her physiotherapist, occupational therapist and her neurosurgeon, teaching each person in the multidisciplinary team how to communicate with her without me there. With this booklet she was able to request to see her each one of her doctors and ask various complex questions about her condition and prognosis and actively take part in decisions regarding her care. She was also able to make us aware of a stage one pressure sore developing on her ear. This experience brought home for me the importance of communication as a treatment priority; not only to decrease anxiety, confusion and isolation, but also to decrease medical risks. Below are the boards I developed which may be useful to others. Remember to ensure that these are disinfected regularly and also used for only one person at a time.

Encourage her to mouth either A, B, or C and then the corresponding number. Or point to A for example and wait for her to mouth yes or raise her eyebrows, or mouth no / scrunch her nose. She can also mouth **up, down, left, right** whilst you point until you reach the appropriate box. Verify with her whilst pointing e.g. "You feel... tired? No? Want to stop? Yes?"

	A		B		C
	I AM		I FEEL		PLEASE
1	Short of breath	Feeling sick	Happy	Sad	Alphabet board
2	Hot	Cold	Angry	Frustrated	Not on this page
3	Hungry	Thirsty	Afraid	Disappointed	Another page
4	Better	Worse	Tired	Sleepy	Explain
5	Wet	Uncomfortable	Anxious	Scared	Stop
6	Nauseous	In Pain	Lonely	Bored	Try again
7	Unsure (of what is happening)		Excited	Strong	New word
8					Write sentence
9					Write down
10					Thank you!

**START WITH SHOWING HER PAGE BY PAGE AND LET HER INDICATE TO YOU WHICH ONE SHE WANTS BY RAISING HER EYEBROWS WHEN YOU ARE AT THE RIGHT PAGE**

When you are at the desired page, encourage her to mouth either A, B, or C and then the corresponding number

Or point to A, for example, and wait for her to mouth yes or raise her eyebrows, or mouth no / scrunch her nose

She can also mouth **up, down, left, right** whilst you point until you reach the appropriate block

Verify with her whilst pointing using her yes/no indications e.g. "You feel... tired? (nose scrunch) No? Want to stop? (eyebrow raise) Yes?"

Feel free to fill the open boxes in or make new pages as the need arises

Encourage her to mouth either A, B, or C and then the corresponding number. Or point to A for example and wait for her to mouth yes or raise her eyebrows, or mouth no / scrunch her nose. She can also mouth **up, down, left, right** whilst you point until you reach the appropriate box. Verify with her whilst pointing e.g. "Please clean your... nose? No? Yes?"

	A		B		C
	<b>Please clean my</b>		<b>I want to see</b>		<b>PLEASE</b>
1	Face		My family		Alphabet board
2	Whole body		My doctor		Not on this page
3	Nose		Physiotherapist		Another page
4	Eyes		The nurse		Explain
5	Mouth		OT		Stop
6	Teeth		Speech Therapist		Try again
7	Hair				New word
8	Hands				Write sentence
9	Bed				Write down
10					Thank you!

SIGN NEXT TO HER BED

<b>The patient is able to understand you. She communicates by:</b>
<b>Yes:</b> RAISING HER EYEBROWS / MOUTHING YES
<b>No:</b> SCRUNCHING HER NOSE / MOUTHING NO
<b>Other:</b> PLEASE USE HER COMMUNICATION BOOK (on her bedside table – instructions are on the first page)
She asks for this by mouthing "book" or turning her eyes towards her bedside table