

Communication / Stroke / God is Patient

Claire: Hello, my name's Claire and I'm a Speech Pathologist. I work in a hospital and many of the people I work with have had a stroke. Perhaps you know someone who's had a stroke...it often affects how a person communicates.

Welcome to Women of Hope. We hope that you are doing well. It's good to be with you again, I'm Carol. And of course, my friend Tammy is here...How are you today, Tammy?

Tammy: Hello, well Carol I am doing just fine. ...and I am excited because we have Claire with us again. The last time she was with us we talked about communicating with a person with dementia so I know you have some good information for us today, Claire. Welcome back.

Claire: Thank you...it's good to be here again.

Tammy: Claire, let's start by talking about what exactly a Speech Pathologist is?

Claire: I work with people who have a problem with their speech for some reason. My job is to help them try to learn how to speak again...how to use their mouth, how to put sentences together, or even how to read and write again.

Carol: It might be good for us to understand what happens in a person's brain when they have a stroke...

Claire: Sure, a *stroke* is a brain injury caused by a blocked or broken blood vessel in the brain. Blood circulates in the brain to carry oxygen to the cells to keep them alive. When parts of the brain lose their blood supply, the cells die because they stop getting oxygen...and that part of the brain no longer works.

Carol: We all know how important our brain is and that sounds pretty scary. So what happens when these cells die?

Claire: Well...the part of the body that was controlled by that part of the brain, may stop working altogether, or stop working properly. So the person may have difficulty walking or moving their arms. They may not be able to think properly or remember things. They may have problems swallowing food and drink. And it may affect how well they can speak or use language.

Tammy: And *you* can help them because you're a speech pathologist.

Claire: That's right. Some people might call me a speech *therapist* – but it's the same thing. One person who's had a stroke may recover quickly and completely, while another person may take a long time to recover. And another person may have to learn how to live with a permanent disability.

And one person may have very different problems to another person. It depends which part of their brain is damaged. It can affect the person's ability to feel sensation in part of their body. For example, if you touch their arm they may not be able to feel your touch. Or it may affect how well they can move an arm and hand - like when they try to pick up a cup or brush their hair.

Have you ever met someone who has difficulty speaking because they've had a stroke?

Tammy: ...I have, and I'm sure that some of our friends might have too. It's becomes very difficult to communicate with them.

Carol: On Women of Hope today our guest is Claire. She is a speech therapist and she is helping us learn how we can communicate more effectively with a person who has had a stroke. She has already told us that a stroke can affect each person differently so Claire tell us about the ways a stroke can affect someone's communication.

Claire: There are many ways that a stroke can affect how a person communicates. Let me tell you about Stephen. When I first met him in the hospital, his speech was really difficult to understand. The muscles of his mouth had become quite weak. His mouth would not move the way he wanted it to...his speech sounded very slurred and all the words just blurred together. Now what could I do to help him?

The first thing I did was quite simple – I would ask him questions so that he only needed to say *yes* or *no*...or to just nod his head for *yes* or shake his head for *no*. This way he didn't have to say much, but could still let me know what he wanted. Think about these as 'yes/no' questions. But of course I had to have *some* idea what he might want so I could ask the right questions.

Always start with *general questions* - for example, rather than asking Stephen, "What drink would you like?" I would ask: "Would you like a drink?" If he said *yes* or nodded his head I would ask, "Would you like a *hot* drink?" If he said *yes* or nodded I would ask, "Would you like tea?" If he said *no* or shook his head I would ask, "Would you like coffee?"

Our conversations would take a long time, but they were less frustrating for both of us because I understood what he really wanted.

Carol: I love the way you did this because it shows someone that you care about what they want to say, even if it takes longer and needs lots of patience!

Claire: And Stephen had a clever trick that he used to help me understand what he wanted to say. He would shorten his sentences to a few words. Instead of saying, "I'm tired and want to go to bed," he would simply say, "Bed please". Sometimes he would get excited and try to say long sentences. I had to remind him to just use the 'important words'. Of course, if I really couldn't understand what he was saying, he could write it down for me. But I always took time to try to understand his words first.

Do you know someone whose speech is hard to understand? Perhaps you could try asking 'yes/no' questions...or ask them to tell you just the important words and see if that helps you both understand each other more easily.

Tammy: Those are very simple ideas – and I would like to try it. Can we? Carol, can you think of a 'yes/no' question to ask me?

Carol: Okuumm...how are you feeling today?oh no, that's not right. I would need to say, "Are you feeling well today Tammy?"

Tammy: And if I said "no" then what would you ask me? Let's try it...

Carol: Do you have a sore throat?

Tammy: No

Carol: Do you have a tummy ache?

Tammy: No

Carol: Do you have a headache?

Tammy: Yes

Claire: That's it! It sometimes takes time and a lot of patience to find out what the person needs or wants. But it's worth the special effort.

I remember having fun drawing pictures with another person - Leila. Leila had a stroke and she often struggled to remember the names of objects. So she used to try drawing a picture instead. And while she was drawing it, she would try to tell me what it looked like - its colour or size, or where I might find it in the house.

Other times she would point to the object or take me to it...and sometimes when she looked at it, she would remember the word. We both got very excited when she remembered the right name! Sometimes Leila would say the wrong word for something, which was a bit confusing. One time she was telling me about herself and she said, "We have two cats and they bark a lot". I was sure she didn't mean to say *cats*, so I said, "So you have two *dogs*?" She laughed because she realised she had said the wrong word. So if you think the person has said the wrong word, you can repeat back to them what you *think* they mean. That can help a lot. And if you've guessed the wrong thing – then they can say, 'No' and you can try again until you find the *right* word.

Very important - if you *don't* understand, *don't pretend you do!* That's very frustrating for the person trying to tell you something – they know if you really understand or not.

Carol: Yes that's what my friend Stevie says...she has Cerebral Palsy and sometimes her words don't come out the way she wants them to either. It's not fair to her if I pretend I understand. It's better if I say, "I didn't understand that – can you say it again." She doesn't mind saying it again...and even *again* sometimes! She says she always knows if the person pretends they understand. It's not fair to do that to her.

Claire: With a person who's had a stroke, it might be the other way round. A common difficulty they might have is, understanding what *you* are saying to *them*. Their brain might have difficulty understanding particular *words*...or perhaps the sentence is too *long*...or perhaps the topic is too *complicated*.

So – speak in shorter sentences, and use simple language. Just say *one thing at a time* with a pause in between so they have time to think about what you've just said. We call that 'processing' – their brain needs time to *process* the meaning of your words. And if you can, *show them* what you're talking about too. For example, one time I was with another patient of mine and I was asking what she wanted for lunch, but she was having trouble understanding what I was saying. So we went into the kitchen together, and as I asked her what she wanted I pointed to the food. Then she could just say 'yes' or 'no'. I even picked up an apple and handed it to her. She could see by the expression on my face too that I was asking her a question about the apple, even if she wasn't quite sure at first what my question was!

Tammy: We have learned a lot already today about communicating with someone who has had a stroke.

Carol: We have. First, we need to ask the person questions that only need a *yes* or *no* answer.

Tammy: Then we can remind the person to just say the *important words* rather than trying to say a long sentence.

Carol: If you still don't understand what the person wants, ask them to draw a picture if they can. If they can't think of the name of something, they might be able to describe it – like: it's small and soft and says "miaow."

Tammy: A cat!!

Claire: And if you're not quite sure what they mean, repeat it back to them so they can tell you if you're right – *or not*. And if not – then start again. Take time to make sure you understand.

Use simple language and short sentences to help them understand you. And if you can, point to what you're talking about.

Carol: Claire – This time together has been so helpful. I'm we will all remember some of the ideas that will help all of us if we're talking with a person who has trouble communicating with us – for whatever reason. We need to be very patient.

Now we have a special treat, because Claire is going to tell us a story from God's word, the Bible.

Claire: As I work with people who've had a stroke I have to be very *patient* with them. And they have to be patient with *me* as we try to understand each other. Sometimes we laugh together when we don't understand – but in the end we usually manage to understand each other!

I want to tell you today about someone who is *very patient* – God! I was reading a Bible story not long ago and I thought – 'God is very patient, loving, caring, and gentle.' I would love to share this story with you, because the God we know today is the same as the God in the Bible – and he loves you.

This story shows how loving and patient God was with a woman named Hagar. We've heard stories on Women of Hope about Abraham and Sarah. But this story happened very early on, when their names were Abram and Sarai. Let's listen to the story first. It's from the beginning part of the Bible, Genesis (ch16: 1-10).

ROS: *Now Sarai, Abram's wife, had borne him no children. But she had an Egyptian slave named Hagar; so she said to Abram, "The LORD has kept me from having children. Go, sleep with my slave; perhaps I can build a family through her."*

Abram agreed to what Sarai said. So after Abram had been living in Canaan ten years, Sarai his wife took her Egyptian slave Hagar and gave her to her husband to be his wife. He slept with Hagar, and she conceived.

When she knew she was pregnant, she began to despise her mistress. Then Sarai said to Abram, "You are responsible for the wrong I am suffering. I put my slave in your arms, and now that she knows she is pregnant, she despises me. May the LORD judge between you and me."

"Your slave is in your hands," Abram said. "Do with her whatever you think best." Then Sarai mistreated Hagar; so she ran away from her.

The angel of the LORD found Hagar near a spring in the desert; it was the spring that is beside the road to Shur. And he said, "Hagar, slave of Sarai, where have you come from, and where are you going?"

"I'm running away from my mistress Sarai," she answered.

Then the angel of the LORD told her, "Go back to your mistress and do what she tells you to do." The angel added, "I will increase your descendants so much that there will be too many to count."

Carol: This seems like a very complicated story. It is so full of ups and downs.

Sarai, Abram's wife had no children. She had a slave girl named Hagar. She decided to give her slave girl to her husband Abram so Hagar could have a child for her.

Tammy: Then Hagar conceives – but as soon as she knew she was pregnant she began to *despise*, or hate, her mistress Sarai. So Sarai then told Abram what was happening and he told her to do whatever she thought was best.

Carol: Sarai treated Hagar badly – and Hagar ran away. The angel of the Lord found Hagar near a spring of water in the desert and spoke to her.

“Where have you come from and where are you going?” he asked her.

Tammy: Do you remember what she answered? Yes she told him she was running away from Sarai. And the angel of the Lord told her to go back to her mistress and do what she told her to do. He also said he would give her more descendants than anyone could count.

Claire: Who acted wrongly in this story...Sarai or Hagar? I think they both acted wrongly towards each other, don't you? Hagar became proud of being pregnant and began to think she was better than Sarai. Sarai then treated Hagar badly. We don't know how, but it was bad enough to make Hagar run away. Hagar must have felt lonely and miserable out in the desert.

Then God found her. An *angel of the Lord* is another way of describing God's presence. I love the questions God asks Hagar when he finds her – “*Where have you come from, and where are you going?*”

Do you think God knew the answer to these questions without having to ask Hagar? Yes – after all, he *is* God, who knows everything! But God showed how much he cared for Hagar and loved her. And he was patient with her! He wanted to hear Hagar tell him how she was feeling and what had happened to her. She told God why she was sitting in the desert and what Sarai had done to her. But perhaps she also *confessed* to God that she too had done something wrong. God already knew that, but he was patient when he spoke with Hagar, and showed that he loved her. He told her what to do next.

How would you have felt? I think I might have said to God, “I can't go back to *her*.” God knew that what she had to do was going to be difficult – return and face Abram and Sarai. Once again she would have to do what Sarai told her to do as her slave. But God turned the *wrong* done to Hagar into a *blessing* for her and her future generations. Did you notice that in the story? God said, “*I will increase your descendants so much that there will be too many to count.*” God was going to allow her to have more children, and grand children, and great grandchildren and so on. So many she wouldn't be able to count them! What a blessing if she obeyed and did what God told her to do!

Carol: Can you relate to this story? Have you ever felt like Hagar, lonely and desperate? Maybe you felt really sorry for something you've done? Perhaps you've done or said something that hurt someone else. Friend, God knows how you're feeling and, guess what? He knows what you've done. But the good news is, he still loves you. He loves you so much that he allowed his son, Jesus, to die, and to shed his blood to take away the punishment for the things we have done wrong.

Tammy: He is patient with us and loves us and he will forgive us if we ask him to. Let's talk to Him right now....

Thank you father God for loving us, for being patient with us and for forgiving us for what we have done wrong if we confess it to you. We pray in the name of your son, Jesus, Amen.

Carol: Well, as always, our time has gone by much too quickly. We would love to hear from you. Tell us how you have learned to communicate with someone you know who has had difficulty talking and communicating. Or just share with us about your own life and what you are going through. Remember God is very patient and he loves you. We do hope you will be with us again. Have a great week filled with God's blessings.

© Copyright Trans World Radio 2013