



“My husband is finding conversations very difficult”

This could be aphasia (also known as dysphasia), a total or partial loss of ability to use or understand language.

Aphasia can exist while other cognitive abilities remain intact and can affect spoken and written language. Aphasia can be mild, moderate or severe. Whilst it is obvious when it is severe, it is easy to overlook mild communication problems. Common causes include stroke, acquired brain injury, cerebral tumours, nervous system infections, dementias and psychosis. Damage to the left hemisphere is mostly associated with aphasia but damage to the right hemisphere can cause difficulty with understanding metaphors and subtleties of language.

It is important to determine the level of any comprehension difficulty from the point of view of assessing mental capacity and informed consent. Of particular note is the issue of perseveration, where the individual repeats a particular word, for example ‘yes’ or a name or a swear word without intention.

Referral to a speech and language therapist can add value by:

- Maximising the patient’s potential to recover their speech, language and communication skills
- Developing effective conversation strategies for use by the patient and those they communicate with
- Helping the patient to regain and maintain their quality of life