"Places and Spaces: learning about re-learning, in home-based rehabilitation for people with aphasia.

Seminar Presentation
Aphasia is a language impairment that can affect spoken language, understanding, reading or writing, in different combinations and severities, and is caused most frequently by stroke. In the UK, people with aphasia receive their rehabilitation in a variety of settings, including acute hospitals, specialist stroke units and at home, through Early Supported Discharge. In Early Supported Discharge, people with aphasia receive support from healthcare professionals, as needed. The intensity of rehabilitation is increased further by Rehabilitation Assistants and Assistant Practitioners implementing these programmes in Norfolk seven days a week.

(Re-) learning is a central principle of rehabilitation and is crucial to recovery after stroke. Practice, intensity, saliency, setting and feedback, impact on neuroplasticity and, therefore on (re-) learning. However, in in-patient acute settings, people with aphasia communicate with healthcare professionals for less than 50% of their time and spend 60% of their time alone, with people with aphasia spending more time alone than people post-stroke without aphasia. Little is known about how the home-based environment can be optimised to maximise the opportunities to enhance (re-) learning during routine rehabilitation.

We will discuss findings from an exploratory study of routine rehabilitation in the context of Early Supported Discharge: what conditions enhance (re-) learning? What is the nature of these conditions? How do they arise? How consistently are they realised? The experience and perspectives of healthcare professionals and people with aphasia will also be discussed. This research identified opportunities to enhance (re-) learning and to understand the complexities in routine rehabilitation that can act as barriers to or facilitators to these opportunities being taken up. These will be discussed, emphasising clinical and research implications.

Brief Biography
Ciara Shiggins is a Speech and Language Therapist, with a particular interest in the area of acquired communication disorders, including aphasia, and the impact of stroke. Much of her research focuses on optimising (re-) learning and enhancing routine rehabilitation. She also has a keen interest in maintaining and sustaining well-being for people with aphasia and enhancing their participation post-stroke. She joined UEA in 2012 to complete her PhD (in 2016) and currently holds an Academic Fellowship in the School of Health Sciences. She is voluntary facilitator of the Aphasia Café in Norwich and has long experience co-producing research with people with aphasia, including: in co-designing projects and co-authoring reports. The excellence of her community work with people with aphasia has been recognised by a recent UEA Engagement award.

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