



KIM'S APPROACH

Meet Kim

Kim Hartley is the National Officer for the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists. The role of a speech and language therapist involves helping people with their communication, as well as with any difficulties they may have with eating, drinking and swallowing. Kim has worked with children with additional support needs and adults with learning disabilities, both in the community and in state hospitals. Towards the end of her clinical practice, she worked on a project called 'Better Health through Better Communication' which was about promoting communication access to primary care services for people with communication support needs.



What does self management mean for Kim?

In Kim's experience, self management is about increasing the protective factors for health and well being. In relation to eating, drinking and swallowing, it's about maintaining nutrition. With communication disability, it is maintaining a person's social inclusion, enabling them to access education, employment and to enjoy all those other things that contribute to a good quality of life. Self management is also about minimising or reducing the risk factors that might impact on someone's health and well being.

"It's about reducing the likelihood of having to drop out of employment or not being able to enjoy a social life, not being able to enjoy the relationships with your family or your community."

How does self management fit into Kim's work?

Kim sees self management as the primary objective of speech and language therapy.

"In relation to communication support needs self management is, at a specialist level, all about enabling the person to develop their skills or regain skills or cope with the communication disabilities that their long term conditions might create for them."

Top Tip: Remember that not everyone is able to read or write, speak or easily understand what services are being offered to them or how they can help them.

Speech and language therapy involves therapists working with people and communities where people with communication disabilities want to live, to create environments where they can access the services and opportunities that others can enjoy. In practice, this involves supporting service providers and creating communities that adopt an inclusive communication approach. Kim compares this with measures to support people with physical activities, such as installing ramps for wheelchairs.

"This might involve introducing communication accessible information so that employers can provide health and safety or recruitment information in a communication accessible way."

Kim sees a dual role for speech and language therapists in self management. First, they work with the person with support needs to enable them to change/develop, but a significant part of their role is also to support the person to self manage by changing the world around them so it is more responsive to their communication and support needs:

Top Tip: Effective communication between service providers and users is essential.

For instance, When it comes to eating and drinking the role of the speech and language therapist is largely about enabling the person to cope with the loss of eating, drinking or swallowing skills. They give them strategies so they're not coughing and choking during meal times, enabling them to enjoy a wide range of foods and enjoy meals with their family. However, they also work with others, training or supporting carers or catering staff involved in preparing food, so the person doesn't need to cope on their own.

How does self management help Kim and her colleagues?

"As a speech and language therapist, the reason I get up in the morning is that I want to see people with communication support needs or eating, drinking and swallowing difficulties enjoying a good quality and living independently. So self management is my whole motivation."

For Kim and her colleagues, the goal is to support people to live fulfilling happy lives, despite their communication difficulties. Kim finds enormous satisfaction in seeing the difference that speech and language therapy can make to people's lives, enabling people to do things or go places that they otherwise would not have the confidence or ability to do.

How self management helps the people Kim's members work with who are living with one or more long term conditions

Kim feels that self management gives people the freedom to get on with their lives and get past the barriers they face because of difficulties with communication, eating, drinking or swallowing. She is convinced of the need for services to be inclusive in terms of communication so that communication difficulties are no longer a barrier to getting into school, college or work, nor do they prevent people from going to the pub and socialising and doing all the other things that people dream about and aspire to.

"I have to say though that what's really, really important is that self management for people with communication and support needs can only work if the world around them adapts and becomes more inclusive."

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Registered in Scotland No. 307731 Charity number SC037475.

This campaign is supported by funding from the Scottish Government.

