Review of AAC interventions in persons with dementia

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Abstract

Background

Communication is an important priority in dementia research. Communication strategies and scaffolds, specifically through augmentative and alternative communication (AAC), offer vital compensatory support for persons with dementia in an attempt to maintain the latter's quality of life and well-being through participation with others. To date, no research review has been published that synthesizes the current research of AAC in the field of dementia.

Aims

To provide an overview of current AAC strategies and techniques used for supporting communication in dementia by surveying the literature base in a systematic manner, synthesizing the findings and highlighting trends and gaps.

Methods & Procedures

A multifaceted search strategy included nine electronic database searches, using specific keywords. Application of predefined selection criteria during screening procedures led to the inclusion of 39 studies. Data were extracted and studies synthesized according to communication partners; description of AAC strategies and techniques; outcome measures; and communication outcomes.

Main Contribution

This review shows that the majority of the research to date has focused on supporting the interactions of persons with dementia of the Alzheimer's type (DAT) using non-electronic memory and communication aids. Future research should focus on social participation and person-centred communication to optimize functional communication with AAC. Training

programmes targeting dyadic interaction and supporting persons with dementia from diverse ethnic backgrounds are avenues for further research.

Conclusions

Research trends and, more importantly, the gaps highlighted in this research review present speech–language therapists and researchers with a set of current priorities that are necessary for the advancement of the knowledge base.

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