SPEECH AND LANGUAGE THERAPIST:

Rita: My name's Rita Thakaria and I'm caretaking head of Speech and Language Therapy Services in Redbridge Outer North East London Community Services. I head up a team of speech and language therapists that provide services into the acute and community sector, we see patients on the wards, on the stroke unit, in their own homes, in nursing homes and in out-patients clinics. The types of conditions we help with are with patients who have problems with communication and problems with swallowing, so patients may develop speech and language difficulties after stroke or Parkinson's disease, they may have difficulties with swallowing whereby they are unable to chew and coordinate the swallowing process, and where we come in as speech and language therapists is to help them remediate those difficulties and provide functional rehab programmes.

Carla: My name's Carla Bone, I'm actually the specialist speech and language therapist for the community services in Redbridge. My main role is actually working with the stroke patients and any other neurological conditions, for example, the progressives, Parkinson's and motor neuron diseases.

Rita: The service has gone through significant changes over the last few years. A quarter of our case load is from the ethnic minority population. And they present us with unique challenges and up until now we've not felt that we've actually met that challenge, but now we can. The ideal scenario is that we can provide speech and language therapy in their home language and we are now in a situation where we can do that. The key has been about innovation and our vision is about reconnecting our patients into their communities. So what we've done here is engage with those communities and said, look here's a new service model, here's a new therapy model. We have recruited volunteers from the main community groups that we serve and we have trained them in basic speech and language therapy support skills which allows them to see our patients in their own home environment and provide therapy in their home language with the support of a specialist on hand.

Therapist: We are going to do some of the computer therapy.

Carla: One of the challenges in speech therapy is actually getting patients to be able to move into the home environment retaining those skills we taught them in clinic, so what we now try to do is think outside the box a little bit more as to how we might be able to get them to maintain those gains where they most need them which is obviously in the home environment, and the way we've done that is to look at computer therapy systems, and we found with those kind of therapy systems patients are much more empowered because they are able to sit at home, do them as and when they have the time, they feel like they're much more motivated to do it because it's on a much more modern system, they're not having to come to clinic.

Therapist: Very good.

Carla: One hour with a therapist once a week might lead to eleven hours of practise at home.

Patient: When I first started this it was hard.

Therapist: Right, so do you use it every day?

Patient: Yea.

Therapist: Right, for how long?

Patient: Make it a lot easier.

Therapist: About an hour a day?

Patient: Very well actually, made me better.

Rita: The impact will potentially be huge, by redesigning our services our patients are able to reconnect with not only their family members but with the wider community and essentially with the society they are actually part of.

Carla: I went into a career as a speech and language therapist like most of us do because we want to make a difference to those having problems with their communication, so obviously by using all these new innovative systems, it's been a great achievement to be able to actually fulfil those ambitions to be able to make a difference to the patients we are serving. I remember some of my patients saying they felt more like they were more in control of their condition rather than the condition controlling them and I think that's really tantamount to what we are trying to achieve with the work we are doing.