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Creators	Bowen, Audrey, Hesketh, Anne, Patchick, Emma, Young, Alys, Davies, Linda, Vail, Andy, Long, Andrew F, Watkins, Caroline Leigh, Wilkinson, Mo, Pearl, Gill, Lambon Ralph, Matthew A and Tyrrell, Pippa

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SPEECH THERAPY AFTER STROKE

Authors' reply to Enderby, Meteyard, and Thornton

Audrey Bowen *senior lecturer in psychology*[1], Anne Hesketh *clinical senior lecturer in speech and language therapy*[1], Emma Patchick *trial manager*[1], Alys Young *professor of social work education and research*[2], Linda Davies *professor of health economics*[3], Andy Vail *senior lecturer in biostatistics*[4], Andrew F Long *professor of health systems research*[5], Caroline Watkins *professor of stroke and older people's care, chair of UK Forum for Stroke Training*[6], Mo Wilkinson *visitor monitor*[1], Gill Pearl *speech and language therapist*[7], Matthew A Lambon Ralph *professor of cognitive neuroscience*[8], Pippa Tyrrell *professor of stroke medicine*[9]

[1]HCD, Ellen Wilkinson Building, University of Manchester, Manchester Academic Health Science Centre (MAHSC), Manchester M13 9PL, UK; [2]Jean McFarlane Building, University of Manchester MAHSC ; [3]Manchester Health Sciences Research Group: Health Economics, Jean MacFarlane Building, University of Manchester MAHSC; [4]University of Manchester MAHSC, R&D Support Unit, Salford Royal NHS Foundation Trust, Salford, UK; [5]School of Healthcare, University of Leeds, Leeds, UK; [6]Clinical Practice Research Unit, University of Central Lancashire, Preston, UK; [7]Speakeasy, c/o 2 Purbeck Drive, Bolton, UK; [8]NARU, University of Manchester MAHSC; [9]University of Manchester MAHSC, Salford Royal NHS Foundation Trust

It is encouraging to see the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists supporting randomised controlled trials (RCTs).[1 2] Meteyard worries that RCTs will not cope with the complexity inherent after stroke.[3] However, many RCTs have demonstrated the effectiveness of a range of complex interventions for heterogeneous populations (for example, stroke unit care, occupational therapy).

As Enderby notes, the Cochrane review finds benefit of therapy compared with nothing. However, like us it also finds no benefit over attention control.[4] So "some is better than none,"[5] but we must be open minded about what is done and by whom. Despite Meteyard's concerns we can rule out those activities provided only to the intervention group (such as one to one impairment based therapy). In the first four months of stroke they added nothing to the outcome for participants from any measured perspective.[1]

Meteyard is wrong to say that treatment was unconstrained and that we examined variation in current practice. Each site altered its previous practice by adopting manualised assessment and treatment pathways, tools, and techniques as agreed by consensus. As Enderby recommends, our therapists targeted therapy to those most likely to benefit and selected appropriately tailored interventions.

We are grateful to Enderby for quoting our cautionary warnings about misinterpreting the findings, especially given Thornton's reaction.[6] Our nested qualitative study showed people with stroke valued increased early support (regardless of whether therapy or control).[7] Interaction with a good communicator may be as beneficial as formal therapy. We recommend evaluating reorganised early services that retain therapists to supervise increased time with less qualified staff, with therapists directly involved for persisting problems.

In response to Thornton,[6] the funding supported a series of studies with more than 700 participants, including studies on developing patient centred outcome measures that have had good international uptake.[8 9]

Competing interests: See original article www.bmj.com/content/345/bmj.e4407.

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audrey.bowen@manchester.ac.uk

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