



Digital Audio and Self-Help for People Who Stutter

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Abstract

The distribution of digital media, specifically audio and video podcasts, is relatively inexpensive and simple over the internet. This article describes the evolution of the self-help movement in the form of interactive digital media distributed world-wide over the internet.

Substantial neurological and genetic stuttering research has been published in recent years, yet the definitive cause of stuttering remains elusive and unknown (Bloodstein & Ratner, 2007). Researchers and clinicians understand that, without identifying the precise etiology, treatment is limited to targeting the superficial symptoms of stuttering. Consequently SLPs focus on behavioral and affective therapeutic long-term objectives because eradication of the core pathology is not a realistic or valid treatment objective at this time (Reitzes, 2006).

As a result, many feel that appropriate long-term stuttering treatment should include the goal of effective communication with anyone at any time in any environment, regardless of stuttering frequency, without shame, guilt, or fear (Hood, 2001); and the use of holistic treatment approaches to improve one's quality of life (QOL) (Reitzes, 2006). Traditional behavioral treatments may, and often do, alleviate the overt symptoms of stuttering (Starkweather & Givens-Ackerman, 2007). However, documenting that traditional stuttering treatments actually improve the clients' QOL remains challenging because measures of QOL are difficult to define operationally and thus difficult to quantify with validity (Ryff, 1995; Ryff & Keyes, 1995).

Research suggests that self-acceptance remains the single biggest factor of QOL for those living in cultures in the "western" developed world (Ryff, 1995; Ryff & Keyes, 1995). Lack of self-acceptance may significantly impede a client's ability to manage and cope with stuttering (Manning, 2000). Subsequently, SLPs and others have noticed the therapeutic efficacy of patient self-acceptance (Reardon & Reeves, 2002; Yaruss et al., 2002). Research reveals that programs focusing on acceptance of self and one's medical condition improve patients' QOL (Clement & Tharyan, 2004).

In self-help groups, clients who stutter and their families seek to improve their QOL through increased self-acceptance (Kurtz, 1997), mentorship (Reardon & Reeves, 2002), peer support (Reitzes, 2006), self-image (Yaruss et al., 2002), and acceptance of stuttering in non-avoidant ways (Bloodstein & Ratner, 2007). Manning (2003) noted, "The support of others who stutter is essential, and the value of support groups cannot be emphasized enough" (p. 120).

Self-help organizations, such as the National Stuttering Association (NSA) and Friends: The National Association of Young People Who Stutter, help many people who stutter (Reitzes, 2006). Local self-help groups also are available in some communities. However, for many people who stutter and their families, access to such groups is limited because of travel costs, local availability, family demands, language difficulties, or their comfort level with the process.

Numerous online support options are available such as e-mail groups and electronic forums, but such venues are largely reserved for typed communication. In response to the limitations of existing self-help support-group options, StutterTalk was created to serve people who stutter at little or no cost to

listeners. StutterTalk is a self-help podcast, available worldwide through the Internet, created by people who stutter for people who stutter, their families, SLPs, and students. Listeners hear us stutter and hear us talking about stuttering from healthy, open, and honest perspectives.

A podcast is similar to an archived radio program. Episodes may be downloaded or played (streamed) online at any time by going to the StutterTalk Web site or by subscribing to the podcast via free programs such as iTunes. Episodes are often downloaded onto computers and portable devices such as digital music players (e.g., iPods) and cell phones (e.g., iPhones, Blackberries). StutterTalk has interviewed many people who stutter, including renowned researchers and clinicians, as well as people who stutter and parents of teenagers who stutter. StutterTalk also publishes video podcasts on YouTube and audio podcasts in different languages. StutterTalk has collaborated with self-help organizations such as the NSA and the Manhattan Stuttering Group to record podcasts at national and local stuttering events.

StutterTalk episodes have focused on a range of topics including voluntary stuttering (episode 9), covert stuttering (episodes 17, 25, 63), speaking strategies (episodes 24, 59), acceptance (episodes 37, 38, 39), the role of religion in therapy (episode 23), talking to parents about stuttering (episode 41), perspectives from teenagers who stutter (episodes 46, 47), and pet peeves (episode 4). We have interviewed researcher Dennis Drayna (episode 18) on genetic research, physician Gerald Maguire (episode 51) on pharmaceutical treatment and research, and several SLPs: Phillip Schneider (episodes 37, 38) on the process of change, Nan Bernstein Ratner (episode 55) on the relationship between stuttering and language, Ken St. Louis (episode 19) on person-first language and cluttering, Catherine Montgomery (episode 50) on intensive speech treatment, and Kristin Chemla (episode 31) on recovery from shame. This month, StutterTalk is scheduled to interview researcher Ronald Webster from the Hollins Communications Research Institute.

StutterTalk may be reached at 206-888-4619 or stuttertalk@stuttertalk.com.

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