



The human aspect of care is our superpower

DR SEAN PERT

The have and the have-nets (revisited)

Nearly 30 years ago, **Dr Sean Pert** predicted that the internet might turn out to be useful for SLTs...

In the December 1995 edition of *Bulletin*, an article appeared by a newly qualified SLT with the title 'A Review of the Internet'. I wrote this article just as the world wide web was being born, and the number of speech and language therapy-related sites could be counted on one hand. I cautiously predicted that "Both the student and practising therapist could potentially benefit from this vast information resource". I'm sure you'll agree that this was an understatement!

Fast forward 27 years and I became Chair in an online RCSLT board meeting. The net has changed almost all aspects of society, and facilitated the delivery of routine care via telehealth, accelerated by the pandemic (Patel et al, 2022). I can pay for almost anything with my smartphone, and access research papers on the go.

In my own clinical practice, I routinely use computerised evaluation of voice to provide near instantaneous graphs and values for vocal pitch and loudness, and even screening for voice disorder using Cepstral Peak Prominence (smoothed) values (CPPS). My team delivers therapy to trans and non-binary people via telehealth.

Like any new technology, innovations can be used for benefit or may pose new and unexpected threats. AI threatens to overturn many

professional roles, in the same way that 'disruptive' technologies have re-configured society since the invention of machines in the industrial revolution (Wolnicki and Piasecki, 2019). I am certain that AI will be as impactful as the arrival of the net.

I asked ChatGPT what SLTs in the UK should consider when using AI clinically. This was part of the reply:

"While AI offers numerous potential benefits, it is important to remember that it should not replace the human element in therapy. AI should be seen as a tool to assist and augment clinical practice, complementing the expertise of SLTs. Ethical considerations, privacy, and data security should also be kept in mind while implementing AI technologies."

I couldn't agree more that the human aspect of care is our superpower. We help our service users to engage, motivating and demonstrating, listening carefully, and creating personalised, co-produced approaches. AI is likely to enhance assessment and diagnosis and allow SLTs to produce treatment plans rapidly and efficiently. AI will provide insights into research using LLMs, and help those using AAC and beyond. Get ready for the future; it's already here. 

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