



# The SPARCSdm Newsletter

Standardized Process Assessment of Relationship-Centered Shared Decision-Making (SPARCSdm)



## Speech Language Pathologists Play Key Role on SPARCSdm Team

**Speech-language pathologists (SLPs)** work with individuals across the life span with acquired and developmental conditions, to prevent, evaluate, and treat feeding and swallowing disorders. We also treat people with all forms of communication disorders such as difficulty with oral expression, auditory comprehension, reading comprehension, and written expression. SLPs are trained to work with the patients and families who are part of the SPARCSdm project including those with brain injury, Alzheimer's disease and related dementias, and children with cognitive and developmental disabilities.



**As SLPs, we develop relationships** with our patients and their care partners to understand their values and preferences and to incorporate these into our treatments. We listen to care partners about their goals for their loved one and we share information from research and from our experiences treating similar patients. The relationship enables us to have productive conversations about care and to broach difficult topics related to prognosis, medical care and discharge planning needs. SLPs are the experts in communication on the rehab team, and you might think we are experts in facilitating SDM. But like other areas of rehabilitation, there is limited evidence for how SLPs use SDM in practice. Barriers doing SDM ways for SLPs include lack of training for care partners and practitioners about how to engage in the treatment planning process and limited knowledge of the ethical and emotional concerns in SDM.<sup>1</sup>

**The SPARCSdm project** is looking to uncover the information exchange and collaboration skills that occur during everyday micro-decisions in rehab settings.

# How do SLPs help people with high support needs for communication such as those recruited for SPARCSdm?

The SPARCSdm project is particularly focused on SDM that occurs between patients with high support needs for communication, their care partners and rehab practitioners. For example, if we are trying to stimulate swallowing, we might collaborate with the care partner to decide if the patient would most prefer espresso, Mountain Dew or chocolate. Or we might introduce low-tech augmentative and alternative communication methods such as eye gaze or pointing to pictures or words. So, we need to work with the care partner to make these pictures and words meaningful to the patient, such as favorite baseball teams, television shows, or outdoor locations. These are examples of the kinds of micro-decisions we will be studying as part of the SPARCSdm project and to learn the types of information exchange and collaboration skills SLPs use during micro-decisions.

We are excited to be part of the SPARCSdm team, sharing our experiences collaborating with care partners to identify familiar topics or areas of interest to help treat patients who are non-verbal and unable to consistently engage with the environment.

## Who are the Speech Language Pathologists on the SPARCSdm Team?

### Team Member Spotlight



**Ann is an Assistant Professor** of speech-language pathology at Lewis University and Research Health Scientist at Hines VA. She conducts mixed methods research about cognitive-communication treatment for persons following acquired brain injury.

**Ann Guernon, PhD, SLP**

**She also studies** how communication and interactions between rehab practitioners, patients and care partners influence patient-centered care and shared-decision making. She also leads research in injury prevention with a specific focus on sport-related concussion in youth.

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### Team Member Spotlight



**Mya is a 2nd year graduate student** in speech-language pathology at Lewis University. Her BA, from Augustana College, is a double major in Communication Sciences and Disorders and Spanish for Professional use

**Mya Amendola, BA**

**Her interest in shared decision-making** relates to her patient-centered values for the patients she hopes to serve in a healthcare setting. She is currently interning as a student SLP where she evaluates and treats individuals at Riverside, an inpatient/acute medical rehabilitation hospital.