

## **Significance of tele-speech therapy for cleft palate patients in Covid-19 pandemic**

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Covid-19 pandemic has dramatically changed the current practice scenario in the health care sector. In the late January 2020, Covid-19 was declared as public health emergency by World Health Organization. The nosocomial spread from asymptomatic carriers & infected patients via droplets is very likely in the speech clinics<sup>1</sup>.

Specifically talking about Speech therapists who are involved in speech rehabilitation of the operated cleft palate patients; they generally cater to the pediatric population. Children with operated cleft palate are at risk of wide range of speech disorders. These are nasal emission, articulation errors & hyper nasality. Anatomic deficiencies causing Velopharyngeal insufficiency require correction surgery while compensatory errors are treated by prolonged speech therapy. Audiological procedures need direct contact with the patients. Articulation therapy is associated with expressions of mouth & lip so it is not possible with wearing mask of either patient or speech therapist. This poses high risk to the speech therapists<sup>2</sup>.

Majority of children who are undergoing speech therapy are at crucial point where they are developing language. Prevention from regular speech therapy due to Covid-19 pandemic will only worsen the children's further speech & language development. This may further lead to poor academic performance, less job options, social stigmata & thus decreased quality of life. This will again increase the burden on parents who are already negatively impacted because of Covid-19 pandemic. The Covid -19 outbreak & scarcity of working Speech & language Therapy centers will cause huge loss to all the cleft children who need speech therapy.

In the view of the ongoing pandemic, tele speech therapy can offer immense help to the cleft palate patients as well as prevent direct exposure of speech therapists. Telemedicine is defined as using remote communication technologies to provide medical-treatment services and information. Telepractice refers to the use of technology to provide health related services that contribute to communication between patient & doctor in order to provide distance education, counseling, diagnosis & even intervention, support<sup>3</sup>.

Because Speech & Language therapy is based on visual-auditory & perceptual aspects of communication, telespeech therapy may be an appropriate opportunity to provide treatment in this sector<sup>4</sup>. The American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA) has guaranteed that the telespeech therapy is effective to diagnose & treat the speech language pathology. (<https://www.asha.org/SLP/healthcare/SLP-Service-Delivery-Considerations-in-Health-Care-During-Coronavirus>)

In conclusion, Association of speech therapy should take steps towards improving technical knowledge of speech therapist for using digital media. Using telespeech therapy while continuously providing speech therapy, therapist can not only perform their duties but also reduce the negative effect of Covid-19 on their economic status & outcome<sup>5</sup>.

Thus telespeech therapy will prevent cleft children from getting deprived from proper speech therapy in the specific age & will enhance contact free & well distanced practice during Covid -19 pandemic.

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