Non-verbal communication in Parkinson’s

Project information

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<td>Lead researcher</td>
<td>Dr Ellen Poliakoff</td>
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<tr>
<td>Location</td>
<td>University of Manchester</td>
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<td>Cost</td>
<td>£65,318 over 3 years</td>
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<td>Start date</td>
<td>September 2012</td>
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<td>Type of project</td>
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Project background

Difficulties with communication in Parkinson’s can lead to frustration and isolation for the person, as well as affecting their family and carers.

Ellen is keen to understand more about how Parkinson’s affects peoples’ ability to communicate - but rather than focusing on speech, Ellen will investigate changes in the non-verbal signals that people use to get their message across.

- **What do we mean by non-verbal communication?** When we speak we also use subtle non-verbal signals to get our point across – body language, facial expression and eye contact all play an important part in helping people understand what we’re saying.

- **There is some evidence that non-verbal communication is affected by Parkinson’s** but there are lots of questions that we need to answer. What aspects of non-verbal communication are affected in people with Parkinson’s? Could people with the condition use non-verbal techniques to help compensate for problems with speech?
What the researchers are doing

In this project, a PhD student in Ellen’s lab will attempt to answer three key questions:

1. **How does Parkinson’s affect non-verbal communication?** The team will video people with and without Parkinson’s as they describe an event and compare the way they use non-verbal signals to help tell the story.

2. **Are the non-verbal tricks people with Parkinson’s use effective?** Healthy volunteers will watch the videos to see how well they can interpret the non-verbal signals people with Parkinson’s use - do they improve communication?

3. **How well can people with Parkinson’s read other people’s non-verbal signals?** Finally, they will test how well people with and without Parkinson’s can understand and interpret non-verbal signals.

How the research will help people with Parkinson’s

Investigating how people with Parkinson’s use non-verbal signals while speaking will help us better understand the communication difficulties people with the condition experience.

Ellen hopes that this could ultimately lead to developing therapies and strategies that can help people with Parkinson’s communicate more effectively.

For more information, please talk to the Research Team

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