

Media Release

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For immediate release

New movie brings hope to Australians who stutter

A new Hollywood film helps highlight the daily challenges faced by people with a stutter and other communication difficulties, according to Speech Pathology Australia (SPA).

The King's Speech tells the story of King George VI's work with unorthodox Australian speech pathologist Lionel Logue to overcome his debilitating stutter and lead Great Britain through the Second World War.

SPA National President, Chris Stone, welcomed the film's release in Australian cinemas and said she is confident it will raise awareness of this communication disorder that affects at least 1 per cent of Australians.

"It's wonderful to see stuttering portrayed in such a positive way and draw attention to the serious impact this type of disorder has on people's lives," Ms Stone said.

"The stereotype of people who stutter having psychological or mental deficiency is unfair and damaging, so The King's Speech will help people understand the true distress and anxiety felt by stutterers."

Ms Stone also spoke about the long term effects stuttering can have, with recent studies investigating the social and emotional consequences of not receiving necessary treatment.

"Speech twitches' are often just the tip of the iceberg of stuttering, whose cause is often neurologically based – which can result in feelings of anger, frustration and embarrassment. It is important that people who stutter know they can receive treatment from speech pathologists, who have the techniques and treatments they need to manage their stuttering."

SPA member and stuttering expert from LaTrobe University, Dr Susan Block said the film highlights the indiscriminate nature of the disorder as well as the different aspects of stuttering.

"People don't realise that stuttering has a physical aspect, affecting motor coordination, as well as a psychological aspect – the anxiety, avoidance and distress. The great thing about The King's Speech is that it demonstrates this and points out that stuttering can occur in people of any background – king or commoner!

"The film also demonstrates the importance of the relationship between an adult who stutters and their speech pathologist – even though treatment techniques have radically evolved since Lionel Logue's time, one of the most important long-term and ongoing relationships an adult who stutters will maintain is that with their speech pathologist."

Dr Block is also hopeful the film will encourage people who stutter and the people around them to be more open about the condition and inspire them to seek treatment.

"I really hope that the film will make people stop and think about stuttering and perhaps even encourage them to raise what can be an embarrassing subject. If you know someone who stutters, ask them if they have seen the film or how they feel about stuttering.

"Speech pathologists have developed very effective treatment methods and if you have any concerns for yourself, a family member or friend, a speech pathologist can make an assessment and discuss the treatment options that are open to you."

Whether a child, teenager or adult who stutters, it is never too late to seek assistance from a speech pathologist. To find a speech pathologists in your local area, visit www.speechpathologyaustralia.org.au and use the 'Find a Speech Pathologist' tool.

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For more information or to arrange an interview with Chris Stone or Dr Susan Block, please contact:
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About Speech Pathology Australia

Speech Pathology Australia is the national peak body for more than 4,500 members. The Association supports and regulates the ethical, clinical and professional standards of its members. The Association also lobbies and advocates for people with communication and swallowing difficulties.

About stuttering

Stuttering is a disorder in which speech is interrupted by repeated movements and fixed postures of the speech mechanism. These interruptions may be accompanied by signs of struggle and tension. The speech disruptions of stuttering range from mild to severe, and stuttering may also be quite variable within individuals. For example, in preschool-age children, stuttering may come and go over days or months. In older children and adults, stuttering may vary according to the communication context.

What Causes Stuttering?

There are many theories and popular beliefs about what causes stuttering. However, despite considerable scientific research from the second half of the 20th century onwards, the cause of the disorder remains unknown. All we can say at present is that stuttering is most likely due to some problem with the neural processing (brain activity) that underlies speech production. In short, stuttering is thought to be a physical disorder and is not thought to be caused by psychological factors such as nervousness or stress, or parenting practices or the way parents communicate with their children when they are young. However, psychological factors such as anxiety or stress can make stuttering worse. Stuttering tends to run in families, and it is generally accepted that this is because genetics is involved in the cause. However, the precise nature of the inheritance is unknown at present.

The impact of Stuttering on daily life

The impact of stuttering on people varies. For example, someone who stutters only occasionally may experience extreme frustration and anxiety about speaking, while another person whose stuttering is more severe may not be affected in the same way. There is no doubt however, that stuttering interferes with communication as soon as it begins in preschool children. Sometimes, children show signs of frustration about their stuttering soon after onset. More commonly, school-age children report feelings of embarrassment about stuttering when answering questions or reading aloud in class. Adults whose work requires effective communication may find their stuttering prevents attainment of their vocational potential.

Stuttering may interfere with people's social interactions and may lead to development of social anxiety. Social anxiety can seriously affect day-to-day life. More seriously, it is known that adults who come to speech pathology clinics with help for their stuttering are greatly at risk of having a condition known as social phobia. Social Phobia is a debilitating psychiatric condition involving social anxiety. It involves pervasive and excessive fear of humiliation, embarrassment and negative evaluation in social or performance-based situations. Sufferers have extreme distress in social situations, social isolation, and failure to participate in normal occupational, social and interpersonal relationships.

(from Australian Stuttering Research Centre, http://sydney.edu.au/health_sciences/asrc/what_is/index.shtml)

