

## “Speaking Out” Conference



Patrick J. Doyle, PhD, GRECC AD for Research, Ellayne Ganzfried, NAA's Executive Director, and Don Weinstein, NAA's President-elect

The Pittsburgh GRECC and University of Pittsburgh's Department of Communication Science and Disorders hosted a National Aphasia Association (NAA) “*Speaking Out*” Conference on July 28, 2012 at the William Pitt Student Union.

NAA “Speaking Out” Conferences are specifically designed to meet the information and educational needs of community-dwelling adults with aphasia, their family/caregivers, and rehabilitation professionals. The conference was attended by 148 registered participants from across the country, and represented GRECC and University of Pittsburgh CSD Faculty as thought-leaders in aphasia treatment, education and patient advocacy.

Many of the attendees were Veterans who completed VA Pittsburgh's Program for Intensive Residential Aphasia Treatment and Education (PIRATE), and who along with family, GRECC, and University Faculty attended an evening reception at the HJH Learning Center to honor and celebrate all persons living successfully with aphasia. The pre-conference reception was sponsored by VAPHS Voluntary and Recreational Services and featured a buffet dinner, entertainment, and raffle supported by local Veterans Service Organization chapters.

The conference program featured several presentations by VA Pittsburgh GRECC and Speech Pathology staff including **Patrick Doyle, PhD**, who discussed contemporary issues in aphasia treatment from a “Patient-Centered Outcomes Research” perspective; **Ronda Wiggins, MA**, who discussed alternative service-delivery models for aphasia rehabilitation; and **James Schumacher, MS** who described several successful, patient-driven community awareness and advocacy projects completed by PIRATE participants. Presentations were also provided by former VA Pittsburgh Speech Pathologist **Mike Biel, CScD**, now on faculty at CSUN, and the NAA's Executive Director, **Ellayne Ganzfried**.

The conference also featured a public screening of award-winning documentary film-maker Vincent Straggas' “*after / words*” which portrays the struggles faced by persons with aphasia and the challenges faced by their family, friends and healthcare providers. “*after / words*” will air on PBS stations nation-wide in the Fall of 2012.

The clear highlight of the Conference, though, was an “EMPOWER” Panel Session organized by VAPHS Speech Pathologist **Brooke Swoyer, MA** which featured 7 Veterans with aphasia who took the stage together, and in-turn, spoke to an audience of their peers, family members, and clinical service providers about their experiences of recovery, moving forward, and living successfully with aphasia. Their presentations not only affirmed their personal progress, but undoubtedly inspired and empowered other attendees to reach their personal goals, re-integrate with their communities and live successfully with aphasia.

To learn more about aphasia treatment, education and public advocacy visit the PIRATE and NAA websites:

<http://www.pittsburgh.va.gov/PIRATE/index.asp>  
<http://www.aphasia.org/>



VAPHS Speech Pathologist Brooke Swoyer and EMPOWER Panel Participants

### DID YOU KNOW...



Two-thirds of all the board-certified geriatricians in the USA received some or all of their training at a VA Medical Center

(And half of them trained at a GRECC!)

