

'Eline Speaks'; A communication application on iPads supporting communication of patients with Huntington's Disease

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Background

Speech and communicative functions are severely affected in patients with Huntington's disease (HD). During the disease, communication becomes more and more problematic. Currently, we use expensive speech devices to help improve communication. Unfortunately, these devices are not user friendly and not covered by health care insurances. Therefore, most patients can not afford them. To overcome this problem, we investigated the possibilities of using an app on iPads. In this project we aimed to improve the ability to communicate for HD patients and as a result to improve quality of life.

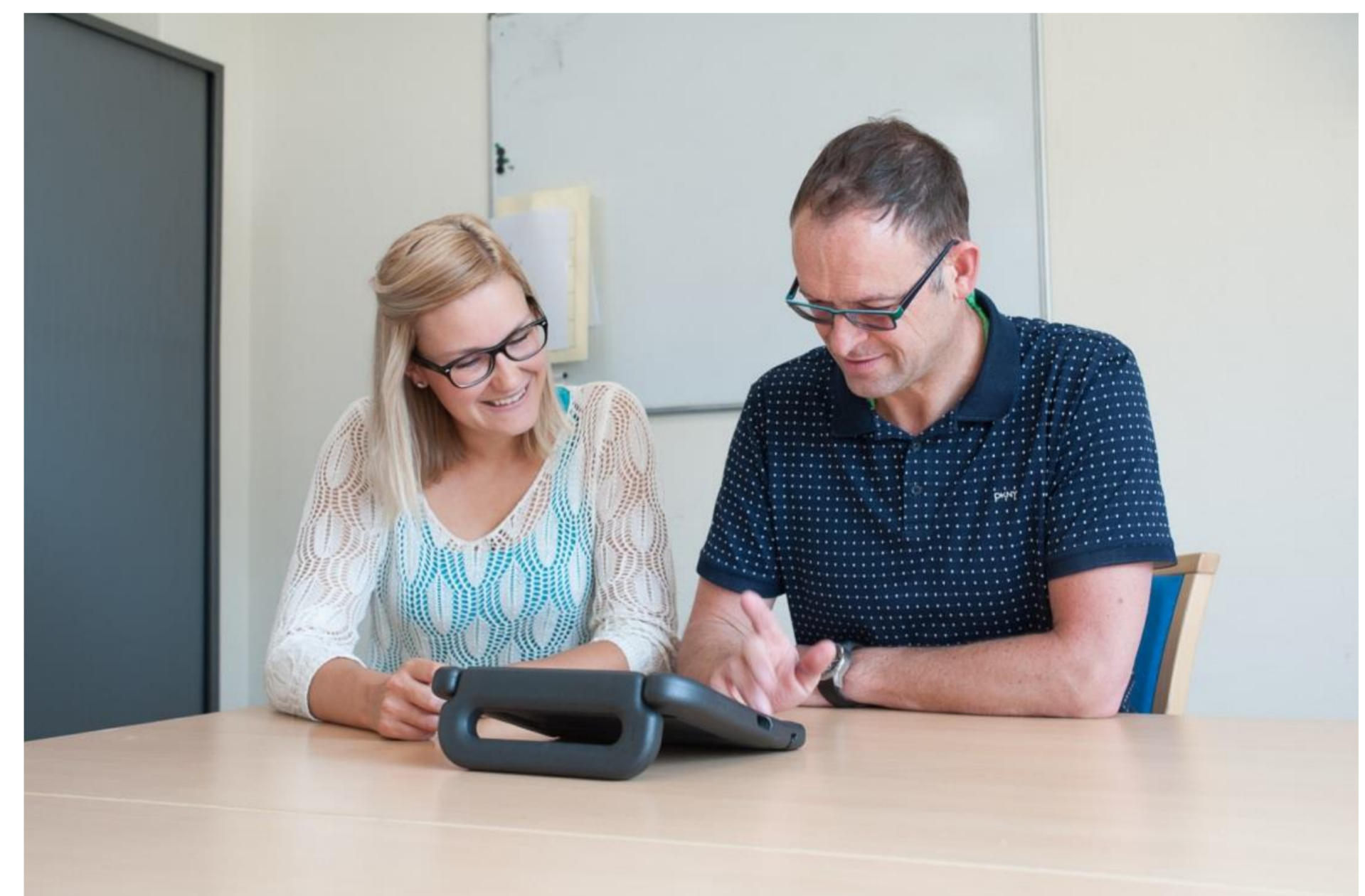


Figure 1. Practicing with 'Eline Speaks'

Case History

After extensive searching and comparing available communication applications, 'Eline Speaks' is chosen. Our choice was based on usability and extended possibilities of this app, such as indicating photos and pictures (Figure 2), and pronouncing the words associated with these photos and pictures, and indicating and typing words and sentences.

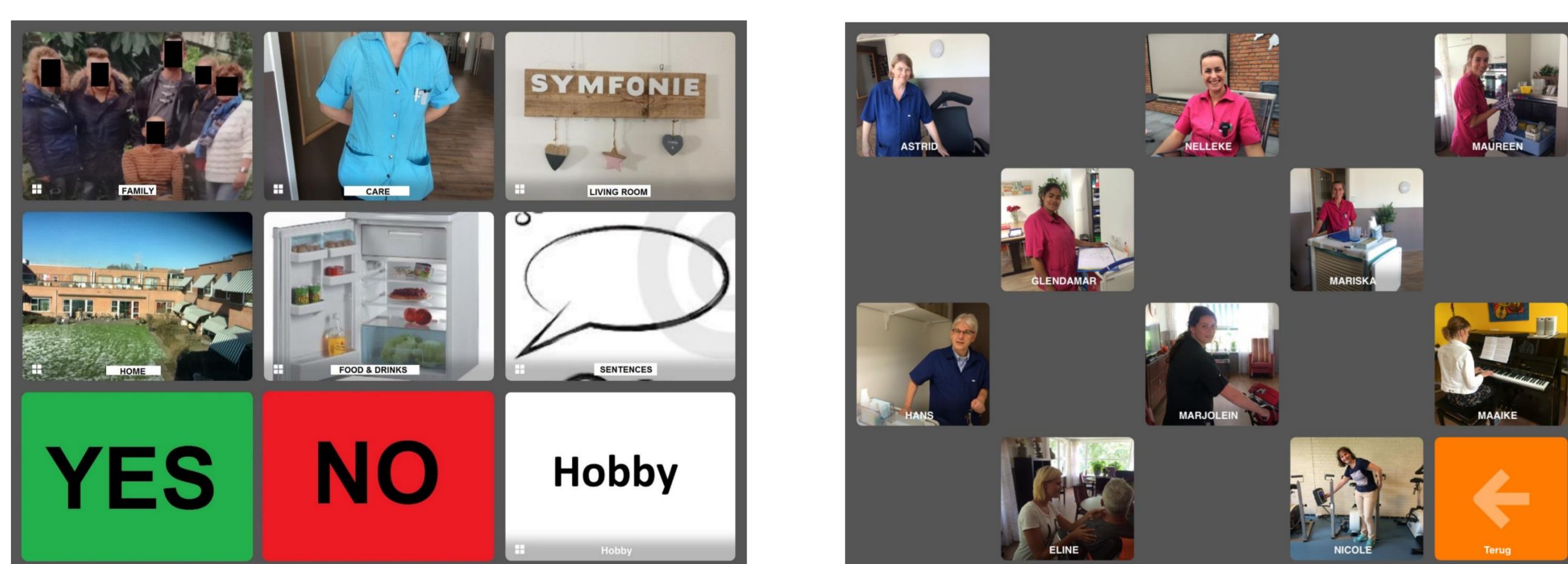


Figure 2. Screen shots of the front page and caregivers page

We developed a manual and training program in which we explained the value of the app and how to use the app and iPad. Many pictures were used supporting the information described in the manual. In total, eight patients were trained. For every patient, the speech therapist designed different communication options, based on individual patients' needs and wishes. Patients were enthusiastic: *"The app gives me the possibility to record my own voice while I'm still able to speak properly. I can make pictures and add it to the app. I really like that"*.

Conclusions

First experiences of HD patients and their family and of the nursing staff are positive. Patients are willing to use the iPad, they found it fun to use the devices and did not see them directly as aids.

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