

## **Dr. Jyutika Mehta Shares How ASNR Can Benefit Speech Language Pathologists**

ASNR brings together a diverse group of neurorehabilitation professionals spanning basic science, clinical and translational research, clinical practice, engineering, industry, advocacy, policy, and other important areas. Though our members come from different backgrounds, we are united in our desire to advance the field and improve neurorecovery through discovery. Jyutika Mehta, PhD, CCC-SLP, FHEA, FASNR FASHA, is a Member of ASNR's Board of Directors and our Membership Engagement Committee, and in this interview, she shares some of her experiences in ASNR and how being part of the Society has enhanced her career.



### **1) How did you first find out about ASNR and decide to join?**

I heard about ASNR through my mentor, Dr. Delana Walker-Batson at Texas Woman's University. She was a member and regularly attended ASNR's Annual Meetings. When Dr. Walker-Batson asked me if I had ever been to a meeting, and I told her I hadn't, she convinced me that I had to go. She emphasized that this was the information I needed to hear, and these were the people I needed to meet to get my lab started and advance my research. I attended my first ASNR Meeting in 2011 with Dr. Walker-Batson, and it was a fantastic experience. Before attending that first ASNR meeting, I had really only been to larger conferences with multi-track programming, and lots of attendees. With these large meetings, I had to make difficult choices about which sessions to attend because there were often multiple sessions of interest happening at the same time. Going to the ASNR Meeting was refreshing because it is a smaller, single-track meeting, so all attendees can go to all sessions. My first ASNR Meeting was really fulfilling, and I continue to benefit from attending the Annual Meetings years later.

### **2) What are some of your favorite things about being part of the Society?**

The sense of collegiality is something I really like about ASNR. The overall environment is very welcoming, and people are open to you just walking up and starting a conversation. When I was new to the field, I was hesitant to approach the big names in the field whose publications I had been reading. Getting to meet some of these people through ASNR has been remarkable. They never made me feel like I was too early in my career or too inexperienced to be part of the conversation. People in ASNR took interest in me and my work. I'll always remember the first time I introduced myself to Dr. Steve Wolf. I had a few questions about the motor control studies he had conducted, and he took the time to sit with me and talk through his research to answer all of my questions. That really left a lasting impression on me.

Beyond the collegial nature of the group as a whole, ASNR provides excellent opportunities to develop more formal mentoring relationships. Dr. Keith Tansey was my first mentor in ASNR, and I always looked forward to my meetings with him. Even though he was not a speech-

language pathologist (he was a neurologist), he spent time learning more about my research. He provided helpful suggestions as I navigated the launch of my independent research laboratory, and he reviewed and gave feedback on materials for my early grant submissions. These experiences helped shape my commitment to mentorship. Now that I am an established investigator, I make sure to take the time to talk to early-career researchers during ASNR Meetings, and I also serve as a mentor in ASNR's Virtual Mentoring Program.

**3) Can you describe some of ASNR's year-round programming and member benefits that you've been involved in?**

I love ASNR's webinars, and they are a great source of information on a variety of relevant topics. I am also a Member of ASNR's Board of Directors, and working with other leaders in the Society has been inspiring and motivating. It was really eye-opening to be part of ASNR's recent strategic planning process, and seeing how this process works was a valuable learning experience.

In addition, I'm on the Membership Engagement Committee, and I've enjoyed being part of the discussions on how to grow the organization and how to continue fostering meaningful interactions with and between members. As part of this committee role, I have been serving as ASNR's social media liaison with Unfold Productions, and I have learned so much from Dr. Marie McNeely and Michael Green from Unfold. It has been rewarding to see ASNR's Members engage more with the Society and with each other on various social channels, as well as to highlight members and their achievements.

Further, I am an Associate Editor for *Neurorehabilitation and Neural Repair (NNR)*, which is ASNR's peer-reviewed journal. Being involved with the journal has given me exposure to a lot of really fascinating neurorehabilitation research that is happening within speech-language pathology, but also other areas outside of my area of expertise. It has been really interesting to see how the peer-review process works behind the scenes and to be involved in article intake, assigning reviewers, and reviewing articles myself.

**4) With so many different professional societies and meetings available, what makes ASNR unique, and why do you think it is valuable for speech language pathologists and other clinicians to be members?**

I'll focus on three important things that really set ASNR apart from other societies. One, ASNR's single-track meetings are a major asset for a field like neurorehabilitation that is tremendously interdisciplinary. As an attendee, you don't have the added stress of having to choose which sessions you should go to and which ones you have to miss. It also makes it easier to meet and connect with other attendees because you have all been participating in the same sessions throughout the meeting.

This brings me to number two: ASNR's meetings are very welcoming and interdisciplinary. The presenters are approachable, and there are a lot of opportunities to start conversations during breaks, meals, and poster sessions. Also, the sessions are designed to be inclusive and to provide useful information for people who are coming from different professional backgrounds

and working on a wide variety of research areas. I've never left a session at an ASNR meeting feeling like it was a waste of time. Bringing together people from multiple disciplines is important for the field, and I've personally learned some important things from exposure to work that is happening in other areas. There are methodologies and approaches used in physical therapy, occupational therapy, neurology, and other specialties that can also be applied in speech-language pathology. Learning more about them has helped me improve my research and my grant proposals. On the clinical side, I am Director of the Mike A. Myers Stroke Center at Texas Woman's University, and our Center provides care for people with stroke as well as a number of other neurological conditions. Being part of ASNR has helped me learn more about treatment approaches that other clinicians use for these conditions. I can directly translate these lessons to improve clinical practice at our Center, provide more interdisciplinary services, and enhance training for our students.

The third feature of ASNR that makes it stand out is the organization's size. ASNR is still a relatively small professional organization. This means that you're not just another face lost in a huge crowd. You can interact directly with leaders in ASNR, you can get involved, and your contributions can make a difference in the Society and in the field. I have been involved in many different aspects of ASNR, and I feel like my contributions have been respected and appreciated. It's really rewarding, and most people won't get these same kinds of opportunities in larger professional organizations.

**5) Do you have a specific example of something you learned through ASNR that has directly benefitted your work?**

Yes, definitely. I use non-invasive brain stimulation in my work, and this is something that relatively few speech-language pathologists use in their research or in the clinic. Through my involvement with ASNR, I learned a lot about non-invasive stimulation from top experts who are doing cutting-edge non-invasive brain stimulation research.

Separately, incorporating aspects of other fields that I was exposed to through ASNR into my own grant proposals has improved my submissions and led to opportunities to work on some really exciting projects. For example, my collaborators and I incorporated gait and balance measures and training (common in physical therapy) into one of our grant proposals that was focused on improving cognition and language impairments in people with Parkinson's disease. The grant reviewers thought this interdisciplinary approach was innovative, and it contributed to me receiving the grant.

**6) Why do you think it is so critical for speech pathologists and other neurorehabilitation professionals to engage with individuals from other disciplines and backgrounds?**

It is no longer possible for us to function exclusively within the silos of our own individual disciplines. We need to learn from each other and inform each other's work. Interprofessional education and interprofessional practice are becoming cornerstones of most allied health professions. This shift is already improving outcomes for patients in the clinic, and I think the field will continue to embrace more comprehensive models of care that draw from evidence generated by increasingly interdisciplinary research.

**7) How do you see ASNR shaping the future of neurorehabilitation, particularly for speech-language pathologists like yourself?**

ASNR has helped me a lot in my career, and it can provide valuable support to other speech-language pathologists. I encourage all of my colleagues to attend the ASNR meetings because there are so many advantages. You get to hear about the latest updates and new discoveries in neurorehabilitation, meet people from intersecting disciplines, and there are also great opportunities for service and leadership. These service opportunities are very important for the career trajectories of those in academia. The fact that I was on the Board of Directors and I'm now Associate Editor of the journal *NNR* — my various roles in ASNR have helped build my curriculum vitae (CV) and provide evidence of my dedication to advancing the field. They have also been a rich source of professional and personal development for me.

In addition, ASNR has provided us with actionable improvements in terms of new tools and approaches that we could implement in our own research and clinical care at the Mike A. Myers Stroke Center at Texas Woman's University. While my focus is mainly on language and cognition, presentations at ASNR prompted me to think more about motor control and recovery, and how motor aspects can inform or stimulate cognitive networks as well. A number of years ago, there was a session at the ASNR Annual Meeting on how robotic arms improve overall upper extremity function after stroke. The data and positive outcomes they shared encouraged us to purchase the same robotic arm and use it during our speech therapy sessions. Our patients now engage in more comprehensive, multi-modal rehabilitation where the robotic arm helps train and enhance their motor function while they simultaneously improve their cognitive and language skills through speech therapy. This whole idea started with attending a symposium at an ASNR Meeting, and it has been extremely successful.

Our students have also used this same idea of improving outcomes by activating multiple brain circuits through combinatorial rehabilitation approaches in their studies. We had an occupational therapy student complete her capstone project on a treatment approach combining pickleball practice with language and cognition training. These kinds of innovative rehabilitation approaches, based on knowledge of the underlying neural pathways involved, are critical for not only improving patient outcomes, but for personalizing treatments and improving engagement and compliance with therapy. In this particular case, the patient reported their dysarthria (speech difficulties due to weakness in the muscles used for speech) improved much more dramatically when they were engaged in the motor task of playing pickleball.

**8) Do you have a message you would like to share with anyone who is considering joining ASNR?**

You won't regret it. It's been a wonderful experience for me, and I think it's important for neurorehabilitation professionals to engage with others outside of our own area of expertise, either in research or clinical care. Learning from other specialties and gaining a more multidisciplinary perspective will help us advance therapies and achieve the best possible outcomes for the people with neurological conditions who we serve.