

Little-known degenerative disease gradually degrades language skills

The GLP aggregated and excerpted this blog/article to reflect the diversity of news, opinion and analysis.

When I first start talking to Joanne Douglas, she speaks slowly but eloquently, with deliberation and confidence. But after ten minutes, I start to notice subtle changes. She repeats some of her words, just a few at first, and then more. Pauses and hesitations creep in. Once-seamless sentences become increasingly marbled by erms and uhs. She sounds tired. After thirty minutes, I know it's time to wrap up the interview. On any given day, Douglas only has so many words to give, and she has given me plenty.

Douglas has [primary progressive aphasia](#) (PPA)—a brain disorder that robs people of their language skills. Unlike other [aphasias](#) (language impairments) caused by trauma or stroke, PPA is degenerative: It gets worse, slowly and inexorably. But unlike other degenerative conditions, like Alzheimer's dementia, it leaves most of a patient's mental faculties untouched. People can still plan, reason, and multi-task. Their memories stay healthy and their personalities remain unchanged, at least at first.

But their blooming inability to write, read, speak, and comprehend can leave them locked inside their own heads, responsive but unable to respond, thoughtful but unable to share those thoughts. "It can be a truly devastating condition," says [Joseph Duffy](#) from the Mayo Clinic College of Medicine. "It sucks our humanity, or what makes us uniquely human, from us."

Read full, original post: [Lost for Words](#)