

Rehabilitation Institute of Chicago announces first research chair for new hospital - Shirley Ryan AbilityLab

The Rehabilitation Institute of Chicago announced on January 17, 2017 that Leora Reiff Cherney, PhD, has accepted the position of Research Chair, Think + Speak Lab, for the Shirley Ryan AbilityLab, RIC's new research hospital opening March 25, 2017. Dr. Cherney is the first research chair to be appointed.



Leora R. Cherney, PhD, Research Chair: Think + Speak Lab Professor, Physical Medicine & Rehabilitation, and Communication Sciences & Disorders Director - Center for Aphasia Research and Treatment

In this new position, Dr. Cherney will be responsible for applying the latest research methods to improve outcomes for patients with neurologically-based impairments of cognitive, language and speech processing ability. She will help determine the future direction of both research and clinical treatment, and will be responsible for developing scientific talent to bring about new discoveries and treatments within the Think + Speak Lab.

The Think + Speak Lab will be one of five applied research and therapeutic spaces within the hospital that tout unique configurations based on the human function studied and the type of experimentation (others include: Legs + Walking Lab, Arms + Hands Lab, Strength + Endurance Lab and Pediatric Lab). In these labs, clinicians, scientists, innovators and technologists will work together, surrounding patients, discovering new approaches and applying research real time.

“Dr. Cherney has extraordinary wisdom in the clinical application of her deep knowledge — the archetype for translational medicine,” said Joanne C. Smith, MD, president and CEO of RIC. “With her quiet, humble and professional leadership style, for decades she has demonstrated a creative approach, achieving success consistently in every endeavor she has undertaken at RIC. Together her character, intellectual curiosity, career expertise and many accomplishments represent the right constellation of gifts requisite for leveraging scientific discovery on behalf of our patients.”

As Director of the Center for Aphasia Research and Treatment at RIC and Professor of Physical Medicine & Rehabilitation at Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine, Dr. Cherney is renowned in her field and has excelled in developing programs that have translated into new clinical treatments for patients with aphasia. These innovations include the use of brain imaging to study language, 3-D avatars for computerized aphasia therapy, and cortical stimulation as an adjunct to enhance treatment outcomes.

Dr. Cherney received training in logopedics (speech, language, and hearing therapy) in Cape Town, South Africa. Upon receiving a master's degree in Speech and Language Pathology at Northwestern University, she practiced at RIC and became a highly skilled and distinguished clinician. She returned to Northwestern to earn her doctorate in Speech and Language Pathology, while continuing to hone her clinical and research skills at RIC. She subsequently developed RIC's aphasia program which offers both research and clinical services, including an Intensive Comprehensive Aphasia Program (ICAP). This impressive program, now celebrated for its effectiveness, was created de novo by Dr. Cherney and her staff, has welcomed patients from around the world, and serves as a model program for other facilities, both nationally and internationally.

Dr. Cherney has received numerous honors from her colleagues, including election as a Fellow to the American Speech-Language Hearing Association. Most recently, the Illinois Speech-Language Hearing Association awarded her Honors of the Association. Professionally, Dr. Cherney serves on boards and committees of major research and clinical organizations, has been awarded scores of research grants including from the National Institutes of Health and the National Institute on Disability, Independent Living, and Rehabilitation Research. She has published her work extensively in the field's major journals and co-authored numerous authoritative review articles. She is highly sought after as a speaker, providing workshops to help clinicians translate research findings into clinical practice and presenting her own cutting edge research at scientific meetings.