

Nurses Improving Care for Healthsystem Elders

# NICHE



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### PROMOTING EVIDENCE-BASED DYSPHAGIA ASSESSMENT AND MANAGEMENT BY NURSES

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**PROBLEM:** Dysphagia in older adult patients.

**SOLUTION:** Development of educational methods promoting evidence-based dysphagia assessment and management by nurses.

**Problem Identified** According to the U.S. Census, 15% of people over age 60 are estimated to have dysphagia. Dysphagia is common in persons with neuromuscular disorders, Parkinsons' disease and dementia. It is also a common sequela of an acute stroke, affecting as many as 50% of patients (Smithard, Smeeton, & Wolfe, 2007). Dysphagia that is unrecognized and/or untreated can result in dehydration, malnutrition, and renal failure. Dysphagia is also believed to carry a sevenfold increased risk of aspiration pneumonia and is an independent predictor of mortality (Singh & Hamdy, 2006).



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**Solution Formulated** To address this issue, the staff of Moses Taylor Hospital's Hospital Elder Life Program (HELP)<sup>®</sup> developed educational methods to promote evidence-based dysphagia assessment and management by nurses. The goals of this initiative were:

- Assess the effectiveness of an educational program on nurses' retention of knowledge over time
- Increase nurse-initiated dysphagia referrals to the speech pathologist

The educational component involved a brief interactive session using a visually arresting poster that detailed dysphagia facts, assessment and management techniques, and PEARLS. The session was part of the hospital's annual competency training workshop for RNs and licensed practical nurses. The HELP staff formulated and conducted pre-tests and post-tests for dysphagia management and assessment around the workshop. Second and third post-tests were administered two- and six-months later, respectively.

**NICHE ROLE** NICHE provides extensive resources to help address the focus areas of the Hospital Elder Life Program educational initiative including core gerontologic curricula and evidence-based protocols and operational tools.

**Evaluation/Results** The sample consisted of 86 registered nurses and 36 licensed practical nurses. Results indicated:

- First post-test showed dysphagia management/assessment scores significantly higher than pre-test and sustained for the second post-test two months later
- Dysphagia educational intervention was sustained since there was not a significant difference in the test scores from three months to six months post-intervention

Dysphagia screening is now part of the nursing admission process for every patient at Moses Taylor Hospital. Nurses immediately contact the speech pathologist if there's any swallowing difficulty. Nurses are more comfortable with assessments, more easily recognize dysphagia, and are more familiar with appropriate referral processes and food modifications.

### For more information

1. Loeb, M.B., Becker, M., Eady, A., & Walker-Dilks, C. (2003). Interventions to prevent aspiration pneumonia in older adults: A systematic review. *JAGS, 51* (7), 1018-1022.
2. Singh, S. & Hamdy, S. (2006). Dysphagia in stroke patients. *Postgraduate Medical Journal, 82* (968), 383-391.
3. Smithard, D. G., Smeeton, N.C. & Wolfe, CD. (2007). Long-term outcome after stroke: does dysphagia matter? *Age Ageing, 36* (1):90-94.
4. Terpenning, M. (2005). Geriatric oral health and pneumonia risk. *Clinical Infectious Diseases, 40* (12), 1807-1810.

### NICHE-related resources

1. Best practice information on care of older adults: [www.ConsultGerRN.org](http://www.ConsultGerRN.org).
2. Metheny, N.A. *Try This: Preventing Aspiration in Older Adults with Dysphagia*. Available: [http://consultgerim.org/uploads/File/trythis/try\\_this\\_20.pdf](http://consultgerim.org/uploads/File/trythis/try_this_20.pdf)
3. NICHE Geriatric Resource Nurse Core Curriculum: Nutrition, Hydration, and Oral Health: [http://www.nicheprogram.org/knowledge\\_center](http://www.nicheprogram.org/knowledge_center)

### About NICHE

NICHE is a national organization designed to help health care professionals in hospitals improve the care of older adults. NICHE hospitals seek to create an environment where older adult patients receive care that results in better outcomes. This climate of success encourages patients and their families to seek NICHE designated hospitals for their medical needs. The NICHE Network now numbers nearly 300 hospitals throughout North America.

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