

# **ADULT MENTAL HEALTH AND SPEECH & LANGUAGE THERAPY**



## COMMUNICATION & MENTAL HEALTH

Speech, language, communication and swallowing problems are often associated with poor mental health in adults. Speech and language therapy supports people to maintain better health and wellbeing, prevents relapse and promotes recovery in mental health.

## Case Study

A lady residing in a step down NHS home had been referred to speech and language therapy 4 times over 2 years. Existing adult speech and language therapy services did not feel she met their service criteria and did not feel they could offer the specialist service she needed. A lead speech and language therapist (SLT) from the Learning Disability and Mental Health Delivery unit agreed to see this lady and offer a brief assessment and advice service, as her unmet communication needs meant she was not able to fully participate in her recovery programme, which was delaying her progress and resulting in her remaining within the service longer than anticipated and hoped for. Upon discussion with the multi-disciplinary team (MDT) it was evident that the team struggled with the clinical understanding of communication difficulties.

Following SLT communication assessment and in discussion with her MDT, key communication targets were identified and advice on how to support the lady was given by the speech and language therapist to the team. Given the impact of the advice given, the psychiatrist and SLT worked together to modernise the service delivery. This included highlighting the need to commission and involve a specialist SLT as part of the mental health team to support with many misunderstood and unaddressed communication needs which were impacting on patient outcomes and patient flow.



## EATING, DRINKING, SWALLOWING & MENTAL HEALTH

Poor mental health can impact on safe eating, drinking and swallowing. This may be as part of a mental health diagnosis, a behaviour or side effect of medication.

- Over **30%** of adults with mental health disorders have some impairment in swallowing.<sup>4</sup>
  - People with a diagnosis of schizophrenia, are **30** times more likely to die from choking than the general population.<sup>5</sup>
  - There is a greater prevalence of dysphagia (swallowing difficulties) in acute and community mental health settings compared to the general population – **35%** in an inpatient unit and **27%** in those attending day hospital, which compares to **6%** in the general population.<sup>6</sup>

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# THE VALUE OF SPEECH AND LANGUAGE THERAPY

## **Speech and language therapists (SLTs)**

- Provide support to ensure people can understand their diagnosis and treatment options, express their views and access talking therapies as part of their care.
  - Increase safety by reducing the risk associated with swallowing problems. These can lead to malnutrition, dehydration, choking, or aspiration pneumonia requiring hospital admission and, in some cases, causing death.
  - Improve access to verbally mediated interventions and talking therapies which require significant understanding and expressive language skills.
  - Support other professionals to recognise and respond to communication and swallowing needs. Including how to tailor information to support decision-making and discuss treatment options.
  - Establish capacity for informed consent.
  - Offer specialist communication assessment in the differential diagnosis of mental health disorders.



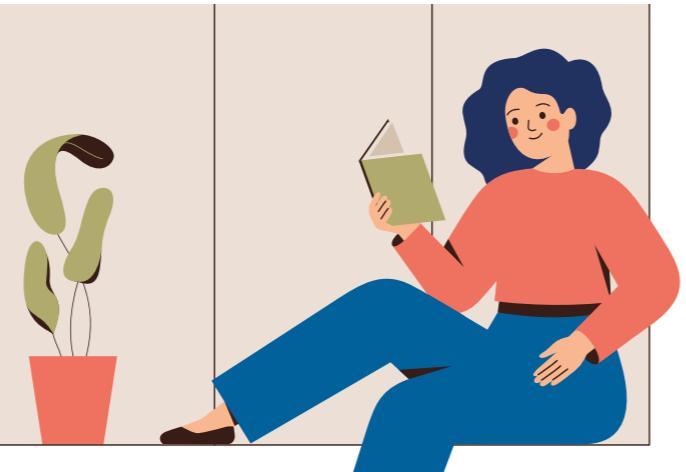
## **RCSLT WALES RECOMMENDS**

**Adopting an early identification and intervention approach to recognise and respond to people's communication and swallowing needs by:**

- **Adopting an early identification and intervention approach to recognise and respond to people's communication and swallowing needs by:**
  - **Commissioning** – SLTs with the appropriate level of specialism are embedded as a core part of the multidisciplinary team in all relevant children and adult's mental health services.
  - **Training** – provide multidisciplinary training to improve awareness of the links between mental health and communication and swallowing.
  - **Workforce recognition and development** – SLTs are recognised as part of the core mental health workforce. Undergraduate, postgraduate and funded professional development are considered to grow and support a sustainable workforce of SLTs specialising in mental health in Wales.

*ACTION 7: Develop and implement a specialist mental health Allied Health Professional (AHP) model as a pathfinder for rollout across Wales.*

# **Health Education Improvement Wales and Social Care Wales draft Strategic Mental Health Workforce plan, 2022**



*Speech and language therapist input would be needed to deal with the additional communication needs that can be experienced by this group.*

## Rehabilitation for patients with complex psychosis, NICE guideline, August 2020

A cartoon illustration of a man with brown hair, wearing a yellow t-shirt. He has a thoughtful expression, with his hand resting against his chin. Two large question marks are positioned above his head, suggesting he is confused or trying to figure something out.

MAE RCSLT CYMRU YN ARGYMLLELI

Byddai angen mewnwbu'n gan therapudd llefydd  
ac iâith i ddellio gyda'r anghenion Cyfarthrebu  
ychwanegol y gall y grwp hwn eu proff.  
Adsefylidlu ar gyfer cleifion gyda seicosis  
cymhleth, canllaw NICE, Awst 2020



Cymdeithasol Cymru 2022  
Meddwl Rhaglen Adolyg lechyd Cymru a gofal  
Draft Gynllun Strategol Gweithlu lechyd  
meddwl fel cymllun braenaru i'w ymestyn  
model Gweithwyr Proffesiynol Perthyntol i lechyd  
CAM GWETHREDU 7: Datblygu a gwethredu  
ledled Cymru.

GWERTH THERAPI LLEFERYDD AC IALTI