



Have your cake, but can you eat it?

Amelia Dale and **Clare Williams** take a look at the events of Swallowing Awareness Day 2018 and review a sample of the activities from across the country

ILLUSTRATION BY Clare Owen

This year, 14 March marked the third annual Swallowing Awareness Day, with SLTs and colleagues from care homes, charities, community organisations, NHS trusts and educational institutions across the UK coming together to raise awareness of dysphagia and how it can affect people's lives.

Taken for granted

Like breathing, swallowing is fundamental to human life. However, for those who don't have dysphagia, the ability to swallow is often taken for granted. For example, most people are unlikely to be aware that humans swallow at least 900 times a day, and that swallowing is a complex three-stage process that requires the respiratory, oral, pharyngeal, laryngeal and oesophageal anatomical structures to function in synchrony, which is dependent on the motor and sensory nervous system being intact.

To bring attention to swallowing disorders and how they can affect people at any stage in their lives, as well as to connect people with



health professionals who can help, the RCSLT launched Swallowing Awareness Day in 2016.

Creating a stir

Building on the phenomenal success of last year's events, this year's Swallowing Awareness Day coincided with Nutrition and Hydration Week, which provided an ideal opportunity for SLTs to collaborate with their multidisciplinary colleagues, resulting in an impressive array of imaginative activities.

With many participants sharing news of their ingenious exploits on social media, the day's events caused quite a stir; so much so that the Twitter hashtag #swallowaware2018 trended UK-wide, reaching 4.5 million people. As well as the flood of activity here in the UK, there was also involvement from more than 30 other nations around the world, including Uganda, Australia, Canada and the US.

Congratulations to all those who took part and did an incredible job of educating their colleagues, service users and the general public about what it's like to live with swallowing difficulties and how SLTs support people with dysphagia to eat, drink and swallow safely.

Here is just a taste of the many impressive activities that caught our eye. To see more, search #swallowaware2018 on Twitter and Facebook. ■

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'Come Dine' at North Manchester General Hospital

For Swallowing Awareness Day, we wanted to create a fun, eye-catching and interactive way of displaying information in our canteen at North Manchester General Hospital. After much consideration, we decided to go with a 'Come Dine with Us' dining table concept, which received a great response both from staff and the public.

We had fun facts about swallowing on the plates, the role of SLTs explained on the napkins, place names highlighting the prevalence of dysphagia in different conditions, and a 'water' jug showing how much saliva we produce in a day! The 'menu'



The 'Come Dine with Us' table at North Manchester General Hospital

contained information about modified diet and fluids, with fluid samples served in glasses. A wine bottle also highlighted that alcohol can be thickened, and thickener tubs made great vases.

Our hospital directors came along as 'guests of honour' and were very keen to learn more about dysphagia and the importance of our role.

The concept was a great success, and worked particularly well because people were able to sit down at the table to look at the information while chatting to us. ■

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Amy Lamond, Specialist SLT, North Manchester General Hospital →



Multidisciplinary workshops at Newcastle University

The Newcastle University Speech and Language Therapy Society collaborated with the university's neurology and cardiovascular societies to run a multidisciplinary team (MDT) event for Swallowing Awareness Day, where speech and language therapy students worked together with medical students in small groups to manage a hypothetical client's care after a stroke. The groups rotated around three workshops, one for each society.

In the Speech and Language Therapy Society room, we ran an interactive session about aphasia and dysphagia, and practised total communication strategies with the medical students. We also held a dysphagia-friendly buffet, where all 60 students in attendance could try thickened drinks and reflect on the impact dysphagia has on a client's psychosocial wellbeing. ■

Gemma Connor, SLT Society President, Newcastle University

Top:
Members of the Newcastle University Speech and Language Therapy Society with fellow students from the neurology and cardiovascular societies

Above right:
A staff member and resident from Woodview and Greenwood Care Home switch roles for the 'assist the assister' activity

Far right:
The speech and language therapy team at Lancashire Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust take their interactive challenges to the hospital wards



Care home role reversal provides food for thought

We celebrated Swallowing Awareness Day and Nutrition and Hydration Week at Woodview and Greenwood Care Home with a whole week of activities.

The week started with a fruit tasting, where residents were offered the chance to sample some of their favourite fruits and try some exotic new fruits – this was such a success that we're now planning on making it a regular event.

Swallowing Awareness Day itself was embraced by staff and residents alike. We switched roles and allowed residents to 'assist the assister'. This prompted a lot of interesting discussions among staff and residents about how it feels to be assisted with your meals.

Managers, carers, domestic staff and others all sampled textured desserts and meals, as well as thickened drinks, and discussed how the dining experience could be improved for the residents.

The week finished with a morning cream tea, which residents thoroughly enjoyed. We sang along to residents' favourite songs as they tried new flavoured drinks, milkshakes and smoothies from the 'hydration station'.

All in all, the week was a great success, with everybody getting involved; and the goal of raising awareness while having fun was certainly achieved! ■

Elliot Daley, Activities Co-ordinator, Woodview and Greenwood Care Home



Taking awareness to the wards in Lancashire

At Lancashire Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust: Royal Preston and Chorley District General Hospital, our aim was to take the swallowing awareness message to the wards throughout the day, and all speech and language therapy staff participated. We were armed with a decorated trolley featuring the RCSLT Swallowing Awareness Day posters and some interactive challenges to help get the message across. These included the ‘thickened mocktail’ tasters, which were a great opportunity for staff to taste fluids thickened to different consistencies. Catering staff joined us in providing samples of modified texture food for visitors to try, challenging their preconceived perceptions of a modified diet.

Overall, the day was very well received by the wards and the various staff we managed to involve. It was a great opportunity to spark some discussions about dysphagia and the assessments and recommendations put in place by SLTs. It also created a good opportunity for staff to ask us any questions they may have (for example: what’s the best way to thicken hot drinks?). Ward staff have often not tasted foods or fluids with a modified texture, so for some it was a real eye opener.

Using Twitter as a platform to promote the day was also very successful – we received recognition from lots of people who kindly ‘liked’ and ‘shared’ our activities, as well as ‘retweets’ from the chief executives! Overall, Swallowing Awareness Day was a fantastic opportunity for collaborative working and promoting the dysphagia work we do on the wards every day. ■

Stephanie Sharp, Specialist SLT, Lancashire Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust



A matter of consistency in Llandough

The Stroke Centre at University Hospital, Llandough, Cardiff held a ‘Get to Know Food and Drink Textures’ event on the ward to mark Swallowing Awareness Day 2018. Staff members were invited to try different food or fluid textures and consistencies as an opportunity to discuss and think about the differences between common foodstuffs, and how they may or may not fit into a modified diet.

A range of three drinks and 23 foods were sampled, and participants were encouraged to fill in questionnaires identifying the consistency or textures of what they were sampling. The event was well attended and sparked debate around the different textures, highlighting how tricky it can be to know whether something should be classified as ‘fork-mashable’, ‘soft’ or ‘normal’, for example.

The three drinks were all consistently categorised (tea/apple juice as ‘normal fluid’; fruit smoothie as Stage 1/Level 2; ‘syrup’, thick fluid), but only seven of the

23 food items were judged the same by all participants (for example, crusty bread and grapes were categorised as ‘normal diet’ by all participants). The food item that attracted the widest variety of descriptors was meringue (Texture C, Texture E, ‘soft’ and ‘normal’). Marshmallows and prawn crackers also prompted discussion, as they were not easy to categorise.

In addition to the food and drink supplied, information panels gave descriptors for reference, and a model larynx was a further source of interest in explaining pooling and vocal fold palsy, for example.

We would like to thank the dietetics department, who were able to provide cutlery/crockery resources for the event, and who also held their own Nutrition and Hydration Week event in the hospital on the same day. ■

Louise West, Specialist SLT, University Hospital Llandough