

Much more than just lip service.... Speech Language Pathology



Dr. Larry Lake is a licensed psychotherapist and the CEO of BayView Healthcare, as well as its parent organization, the St. Johns Welfare Federation. Lake says "as a local non-profit

healthcare provider, we are excited about how this FORUM can help share the knowledge and expertise of the more than 280 healthcare professionals at BayView and across our continuum of care. In each issue we will address an area of interest to help consumers be even more informed about their health and wellness."

This FORUM focuses on raising awareness about communication, cognitive and swallowing disorders and to promote treatment that can improve the quality of life for those

experiencing problems with speech, cognition, language and swallowing.

Jennifer Skorich MA, CCC/SLP, is a speech language pathologist for BayView Rehab at the Samantha R. Wilson Care Center. She has been treating short and long-term care patients for BayView Healthcare since 2004. Jennifer offers therapeutic treatment for a wide variety of medical issues and disorders, but is particularly passionate in treating patients with cognitive disorders or those who have experienced a stroke.

Impaired oral motor functioning can also lead to difficulties with communication. **Dysarthria** is a speech disorder resulting from weakened muscles of the lips and tongue which can lead to speech that sounds "slurred". **Apraxia** is a speech disorder resulting from decreased coordination of the muscles of the mouth and tongue which makes it difficult to begin the movements needed to speak and can sound like "stuttering". If the muscles required for speech are so weak that the individual is unable to speak, a speech therapist can assist with educating and training the person about alternative communication aids, such as communication boards.

SYMPTOMS OF EXPRESSIVE APHASIA

- Difficulty finding words
- Difficulty naming objects
- Using non-meaningful speech
- Difficulty putting sounds together to make words



Our brain is extraordinary in its function and it manages many of the complex activities that we perform daily. Many of these activities are completed without needing much of our attention, such as carrying on a conversation, eating an apple or drinking a cup of coffee. Unless we encounter difficulty performing tasks like these, we normally don't think about them, we just do them. Do you know someone who is experiencing difficulty with any of the above? If yes, then a speech-language pathologist can help!

What is speech therapy?

A speech-language pathologist (often called a speech therapist), is a licensed professional who hold a master's degree in speech language pathology and is a highly trained clinician who specializes in treating individuals with speech, language, cognition and swallowing disorders.

Cognitive Impairment~

Cognition refers to thinking skills. A person experiencing cognitive or thinking difficulties may exhibit: poor problem solving skills; trouble learning new tasks; impaired safety awareness; slowed ability to process new information; impaired judgment and poor reasoning.

Individuals with dementia often have several aspects of impaired cognition. A person who had a stroke, a traumatic brain injury or a simple fall may also have troubles with cognition. Ultimately, cognitive deficits negatively affect a person's ability to communicate and can lead to an unsafe living environment. Speech therapists specialize in the treatment of cognitive impairment and may be able to help.

Communication Disorders~

Some people experience language deficits, or **aphasia**, that significantly impairs their ability to communicate. Most commonly this occurs as a result of a stroke or brain injury. The deficits depend on

the extent and location in the brain where the damage has occurred. There are two types of aphasia: expressive and receptive. **Expressive aphasia** pertains to an individual's ability to express one's self. Signs of expressive aphasia include: difficulty finding words, naming objects and difficulty putting sounds together to form words. **Receptive aphasia** refers to an individual's ability to comprehend others. Signs of receptive aphasia include: difficulty following directions, responding to questions and following conversations.

SYMPTOMS OF RECEPTIVE APHASIA

- Difficulty following directions
- Difficulty responding to questions
- Difficulty understanding what others are talking about
- Difficulty reading

Swallowing~

Eating is a pleasurable and social activity as well as a physical necessity. Swallowing disorders (Dysphagia) affect not only the physical and emotional well-being of individuals, but can be life threatening.

How do we swallow~

People swallow an average of 300 times per day. At least 50 pairs of muscles and a vast network of nerves work together to complete a normal swallow. While swallowing is amazingly complex, the process can be divided into three basic stages: oral preparation, pharyngeal phase, esophageal phase. During the oral preparation phase, chewing of the food occurs and the tongue does most of the work forming it into a ball, or bolus. The tongue pushes the food to the back of the throat where a reflexive action occurs,

triggering a swallow. Once triggered, the swallow is no longer under voluntary control. During the pharyngeal phase, while the bolus moves down the throat, the larynx (voice box) moves upward and the airway is closed off to prevent food from entering the lungs. If the passageway to the lungs is not closed off properly: coughing, gagging or choking can occur, resulting in aspiration. The final stage, the esophageal phase, involves a series of muscle contractions in the esophagus that help propel the food into the stomach.

Dysphagia is a disorder of swallowing that can occur at any point during the swallowing process: taking food or liquid into your mouth, moving it to the throat or moving it down the throat to the stomach. The major complications that arise from dysphagia are poor nutrition and hydration as well as aspiration. Aspiration occurs when food, liquid, or saliva enters the airway, rather than the passageway leading to the stomach. Food, liquid, or saliva that enters the lungs can lead to aspiration pneumonia, which can be life-threatening.

SIGN OF A SWALLOWING DISORDER - DYSPHAGIA

- Coughing while eating or drinking
- Weak or no cough
- Drooling
- Food getting stuck in the throat
- Gurgly voice
- Weight loss
- Recurrent chest infections
- Dehydration
- Reflux/heartburn

Who is affected~

Anyone can have a swallowing disorder, but the elderly are more likely to be affected. Problems with swallowing often occur as a result of other medical conditions, such as: Parkinson's disease, cerebral palsy, gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD), stroke, head or spinal injury, cancer of the head, neck or esophagus,

even an irritation or infection. These conditions can disrupt the swallowing reflex, the coordination of the throat's muscles, or the ability to feel sensations in the throat or mouth.

SWALLOWING DISORDERS LEAD TO:

- Malnutrition
- Dehydration
- Aspiration pneumonia
- Chronic lung disease
- Less enjoyment of eating/drinking
- Isolation in social situations involving food

How a speech therapist can help~

If you or someone you know is experiencing any of the above symptoms, please see your primary care physician immediately. Review all your symptoms and enquire if a referral for evaluation and treatment by a speech therapist is appropriate.

A speech therapist will perform an evaluation to determine if therapy is appropriate and which treatment options to implement. A history of medical conditions, current symptoms, as well as observations from the individual and his/her family will provide information to help identify problematic areas. Strength and movement of the muscles of the mouth, tongue and throat will be assessed to determine if they are functioning properly. Your therapist will ask you to sample various textures of food and different consistencies of liquids in order to observe oral movements while swallowing, as well as posture and positioning. If necessary, there are several special tests utilized to further evaluate swallowing: modified barium swallow and endoscopic assessment. During the modified barium swallow study, the individual is given food or liquid with a small amount of barium in it, and then the swallowing process is viewed as a video X-ray. During a Flexible Endoscopic



Jennifer Skorich, Speech Language Pathologist for BayView Rehab at the Samantha R. Wilson Care Center.

Evaluation of Swallow (FEES), a lighted scope is inserted through the nose, allowing the speech therapist to view the swallowing process on a monitor, while the individual is given food of different textures and liquids of different

consistencies. At the conclusion of the evaluation, your therapist will discuss your swallowing diagnosis and make a recommendation for treatment.

All swallowing disorders are individualized. Treatment will depend on the cause, symptoms, type of swallowing problem and specific underlying medical conditions. A speech pathologist may recommend: oral motor exercises to strengthen the muscles of the mouth and throat, drills that will help improve coordination of the muscles involved, positioning techniques (holding the head a certain way) and strategies to help the individual swallow more effectively, a specific food texture and liquid consistency that is easier and safer to swallow (thickened liquids will help to slow down the triggering of a swallow).

Do you have trouble following along during a conversation? Do you cough while drinking your morning cup of coffee on a regular basis? Talk with your doctor – there are treatment options available – a speech therapist can help. *ry*



Health & Wellness Forum

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BayView Healthcare, also known to many as the St. Johns Welfare Federation, is a private not-for-profit comprehensive continuum of healthcare provider founded in 1920. Our superior level of services includes short-term inpatient and outpatient rehabilitation, skilled nursing (Samantha Wilson Care Center), BayView Home Health, and assisted living (Pavilion at BayView and Buckingham Smith) and the Emergency Charitable Assistance Program. Caring Hands – Caring Community is a separate 501(c)3 charitable organization founded in 2004 by our parent organization. It was formed to support the exceptional services and continuum of care provided to people in need of healthcare services and financial assistance.