Introduction

Individuals with dysphagia and complex communication needs (CCN) are vulnerable for describing their current swallowing status and future wishes. A thorough review of commercially available icons for swallowing and feeding found no dedicated page sets and few appropriate symbols (Begley and Pitti, 07). This lack of readily available picture/page options can lead to unsafe feeding practices and place the burden on family members to provide safe feeding directives.

Working with Lingraphica®, the authors have developed a set of icons and videos that are intended to facilitate dynamic exchanges between patients, caregivers, and relevant others. When appropriate, end-of-life discussions about feeding and swallowing can also be addressed. This poster presents a systematic examination of anticipated feeding/swallowing conversations with related sample icons.

Critical Relationship Between Feeding/Swallowing and AAC

SLPs are uniquely positioned to ensure that individuals with dysphagia and CCN have the ability to communicate about swallowing. The Safe Swallowing in All Environments (SSAE) protocol facilitates the development of these systems by outlining:

- Level of assistance needed at meals
- Adaptive equipment, food preparations and diet/liquid consistencies
- Safe swallowing practices and advance directives.

When clients cannot effectively communicate, the negative outcomes can include decreased nutrition and hydration, potential aspiration/choking and a decline of health. Psychosocial concerns (quality of life, social isolation) are also at risk. Transparent icons and scripts can be an important bridge to all of these conversations.

Safe Swallowing in All Environments (SSAE)

Safe Swallowing in All Environments (SSAE) is designed to aid SLPs in creating quick and transparent Augmentative and Alternative Communication AAC supports for their clients. These pages (static or dynamic) need to provide both client and caregiver with clear reminders about current diet and safe swallowing practices. Having these in place will allow the client to attend to social aspects of meals and not just the medical aspects.

A lack of portability often hinders a client’s (and caregiver’s) desire to take communication devices outside of the home. Luckily, the recent proliferation of handheld PDAs especially the iPhone (SmallTalk®-dysphagia) has broad, positive implications for providing portable and discrete communication in the community. Speaker wallets may be needed to provide additional amplification in noisy environments, but even with additional amplification, these small extremely portable options are an exciting choice for the right clients just the medical aspects.

Communication Scripts

As a client's feeding and swallowing status changes, the communication system should reflect those changes. In the hospital setting, changes are often noted at bedside. By the SLP by leaving a diet directives form for the nursing staff. In other environments, the chain of communication may not be as clear. Icons may be used to clearly note both improvement or deterioration of skills. Another options is to make a Safe Swallowing placement for the appropriate clients and staff that remind everyone of necessary feeding and swallowing practices. When changes need to be made quickly, a digital camera or camera phone can provide the relevant site specific symbol.

Sample Icons for SSAE

As individuals with Holocaust disabilities age, they are at increased risk for worsening symptoms of dysphagia (Hemsley & Banandin, 2003). To support ethical decision making, AAC systems must include options for the client to ask questions and to make his/her wishes clearly known. Phrases that should be available include:

- I do not want my diet altered.
- I do not want any more therapy.
- I only want small amounts of food for pleasure.
- I want my nutrition and hydration to come from a feeding tube.
- I do not want my liquids thickened.
- I want small amounts of food for pleasure.
- I want any more medical tests related to swallowing.
- I do not want any more tests.

Sample Icons for SSAE

Communication Scripts

While there continues to be debate among rehabilitation professionals about their roles in swallowing and feeding there is no doubt that the responsibility for the clients’ ability to communicate about swallowing rests with SLP. The SLP must design the appropriate communication systems. These systems should not only include the opportunities to express the level of assistance, current diet, and safe swallowing practices, but be dynamic in nature to allow for changes in feeding and swallowing function and end of life decisions. The SSAE and associated symbols provide an important first step for meeting these challenges.

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References


Ithaca College.