



Service Priorities and Programmes Electronic Presentations

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Initiation of a Preventive Swallowing Management Program in Head and Neck Cancer Patients receiving Radiotherapy – HOPE Program

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Introduction

Dysphagia and aspiration are common complications following radiation therapy for head and neck cancer patients in both acute and chronic stages. Mounting evidence suggested that prophylactic swallowing exercises initiated prior to treatment may help to preserve long term function and improve quality of life. Internationally, pre-treatment consultation with speech therapists has been a standard care procedure and this preventive and rehabilitative model has been shown to be more effective, constructive and cost-effective. Before year of 2004, pretreatment referral to speech therapists for head and neck cancer patients was lacking in NTWC. A new preventive swallowing management program (named HOPE program-- Head-and-neck Oropharyngeal dysphagia Prevention and Education Program) has thus been initiated, aiming to bridge the service gap.

Objectives

(1) To early identify and include head and neck radiation therapy patients into the swallowing management before the RT process; (2) to educate the patients with prophylactic swallowing exercises; (3) to optimize safe oral feeding and (4) to improve quality-of life of the patients post-RT.

Methodology

HOPE program was initiated in collaboration with Department of Clinical Oncology of NTWC since June 2014. Patients aged below 60 years old with newly-diagnosed head and neck cancer planning for curative radiotherapy were referred to speech therapists before commencement of RT. Pre-RT informative counseling and patient education on prophylactic swallowing exercises were done and swallowing function was monitored at different time-points, i.e. pre-RT, post-RT 1-month, 3-month, 6-month and 12-month. Outcome measures included: (1) response time to first assessment, (2) percentage of patients received first assessment prior to RT, (3) patient adherence to swallowing exercise and follow-up, and (4) satisfaction survey.

Result

From June 2014 to May 2016, 121 patients (mean age: 49 years old) have received individual speech therapy consultation under HOPE program. Average response time of first assessment was 14.9 day and 84.3% of patients (102 out of 121) received pre-RT consultation. For patient adherence, 66.4% of patients attended follow-up after first assessment. Phone-interview with patients reflected self-reported exercise compliance rate was around 49%. Over 90% of patients reported benefits from HOPE program on understanding RT side-effects and prophylactic swallowing exercises.