

# Hard To Swallow: Communication Between Health Professional for Patients with Dysphagia

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## Background

Swallowing difficulties are often seen in older people and can complicate the administration of oral medication, particularly those with modified release profiles that must be swallowed whole. After identifying swallowing difficulties, communication between key staff can be challenging and impact patient management.

## Aims

To investigate the current medication management processes and communication strategies between health professionals for patients with dysphagia in the general medicine division of the Royal Brisbane and Women's Hospital.

## Methods

A mixed methods survey was released to speech pathologists (SP), pharmacists, medical, and nursing staff at a quaternary hospital. The survey contained 14 quantitative questions that focused on knowledge of diet/fluid modification and awareness of medication management for patients with dysphagia. Three open-response questions explored barriers to medication management for patients with dysphagia, what works well, and how management could be improved. These responses were thematically coded.

## Results

A total of 82 people completed the survey between October 2022 and March 2023, comprising 31 (38%) nursing, 17 (21%) medical, 24 (29%) pharmacists, and 10 (12%) speech pathologists. Only 50% (12/24) of pharmacists agreed that they understood diet/fluid modification and 83% (20/24) stated they had never received training on this topic. Only 53% (31/58) of SP, nursing, and medical staff agreed that they had received training/education on modification of medication. For patients with dysphagia, 50% (5/10) of SP staff reported never or rarely referring to a pharmacist.

Key barriers to management included knowledge, timely access to staff, and communication strategies.

Participants felt that access to appropriate staff in the MDT, pharmacy advice, and speech pathology liaison worked well. Mechanisms for improvement included robust communication/notification pathways, education, role integration, and clinical guidelines

**83% of pharmacists state they have never received training on dysphagia.**

**50% of speech pathologists report never or rarely referring to a pharmacist for patients with dysphagia.**

## Conclusion

There appears to be poor knowledge and understanding of management of patients with dysphagia. This work highlights the need for better understanding of healthcare roles, improved ability to refer and escalate patients, and improved knowledge of diet/fluid modifications and medicines modification for the whole healthcare team.

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