

Disphagia and Vital Stim Therapy

Dysphagia, or difficulty swallowing, is a neglected medical disorder that affects as many as 15 million Americans, with approximately 1 million people annually receiving a new diagnosis of the condition. Speech-language pathologists are trained to test for and treat swallowing disorders. Some signs or symptoms of dysphagia are: coughing/clearing of throat after swallow, decreased voice quality (wet, hoarse, weak), recurring chest infections, requires multiple swallows to clear throat, difficulty completing a meal, feeling of food getting stuck in throat, and difficulty initiating a swallow.

Traditional methods to treat dysphagia include conventional speech therapy and oral exercises, patient education, and swallowing maneuvers, however, new treatments are evolving, some of which with great potential to positively impact dysphagia and speed up recovery. The use of Vital Stim (neuromuscular electrical stimulation) is yielding good outcomes in both inpatient and outpatient settings.

To become Vital Stim certified the speech therapist must complete 12 hours of online training and 16 hours of hands on training. The certified therapist should become re-certified every 3 years to keep up on the latest research and evidence behind the treatment in order to provide the best treatment for patients.

Within a 50 mile radius there are only 20 speech therapists who are Vital Stim certified. The speech therapist at Morris County Hospital has been certified in Vital Stim therapy since 2009, and recently received re-certification in June of 2015. She has seen good results with some patients with dysphagia with the use of Vital Stim therapy.

If you are experiencing any of the above sign/symptoms or are having any trouble swallowing discuss a speech therapy referral with your physician.