



**SPEECH
PATHOLOGY**

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Speech Pathology in Palliative & End of Life Care

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Why do we need to talk about Palliative Care?

As our population ages, the number of residents in Aged Care facilities increases and the number of people dying in Aged Care facilities increases. As more people end their lives living in residential care, we need to ensure our practice evolves and supports people appropriately.

Studies show that up to 50% of residents within Aged Care facilities have dysphagia.

- 84% of people with Parkinson's disease have dysphagia
- 80% of people who have had a stroke have dysphagia

A study completed on elderly people within a hospital showed:

- 73% people elderly people have a speech or language disorder
- 11% have visual impairments, impacting on communication
- 36% have hearing difficulties



What is end of life care?

Palliative care is an approach to care. Palliative care and end of life care aim to improve the quality of remaining life for those with terminal illnesses. This may involve therapy or treatment to reduce the impact of symptoms. Palliative care may continue for many years and the individual's medical and emotional state may fluctuate during this time.

End of life care is care given specifically in the last year of life.

These approaches differ to traditional medical management as the aim is not to postpone death but rather to ensure the individual is comfortable.



Why are Speech Pathologists important in this care?

Speech Pathology is a broad discipline supporting individuals with communication and swallowing disorders (dysphagia).

Speech Pathologists are trained to develop a range of skills that are unique and crucial for assisting those at the end of life, including:

- Providing education to clients and family in a way that they can understand
- Providing counselling to clients and families and assist with decision making
- Support and manage communication and swallowing disorders in a way that aligns with resident preferences and wishes

Communication Disorders and End of Life Care

The importance of involving Speech Pathologists in the multi-disciplinary team becomes increasingly crucial when the individual has a communication disorder. Speech Pathologists can assist the individual to express their thoughts, beliefs and preferences or can assist them understand the implications of decisions.

Communication disorders such as aphasia, dysarthria and apraxia of speech disorders can significantly impact successful communication between residents and their medical team.

Individuals with these disorders often have no cognitive impairment and are capable of making their own medical and treatment decisions, however they have difficulty communicating this. Speech Pathologists can be present to provide communication support within decision making meetings.

Patients with communication disorders are at higher risk of preventable adverse medical incidents, therefore it is essential that a reliable communication system is determined.

How can Speech Pathologists support communication at the end of life?

- Setting-up augmentative or alternative communication systems. This may involve supporting a resident's verbal communication or finding an alternative method of communication.
- Training family and/or health professionals in supported conversation strategies.
- Ensuring the environment is appropriate for effective communication.





Dysphagia and End of Life Care

Speech Pathologists should be part of the multi-disciplinary team managing symptoms in a palliative approach for individuals with dysphagia. Speech Pathologists can assess the presence of and severity of dysphagia and provide recommendations based on the best and most current evidence and the individual's preferences and beliefs.

5 Ways Speech Pathologists support dysphagia at the end of life

1. Oral care can be taught to family or friends as a replacement for providing food for residents who have swallowing difficulties or reduced appetite. Regular oral care can reduce the risk of developing aspiration pneumonia, provides comfort to the individual & provides the family with a way they can support their loved one.

2. Residents who wish to continue eating and drinking toward the end of life despite dysphagia can also be supported by Speech Pathologists. Speech Pathologists can provide recommendations for foods that are more appropriate, recommend diet or fluid modification or teach compensatory strategies to reduce discomfort during swallowing.

3. As the goal of the palliative approach & end of life care is not to postpone death but to manage symptoms and increase QOL, recommendations may not be based on what is safest but based on what will be most comfortable for the resident.

4. Supporting and advocating for the resident's right to make their own choices with food and drink.

5. Working closely with the dietitian to ensure the individual is meeting their nutritional requirements whilst having a modified diet.

Summary

The way people are dying has been changing and continues to change and our provision of palliative and end of life care needs to shift accordingly. Individuals at the end of their life need to be supported by a team of health professionals, including a Speech Pathologist, to allow the best care.



Need Speech Pathology advice for someone in Palliative Care?

To consult with OSCAR Care Group's Speech Pathologist, Delaney Sadler, please call or email via our contact details below.



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