

SAFE - Swallow Assessment for Emergency

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Abstract

A rapid response dysphagia service was piloted within the A&E departments Queen Elizabeth Hospital Woolwich (QEH) and University Hospital Lewisham (UHL) and within the community serviced by the Lewisham Adult Therapy Team (LATT) in Lewisham borough from January to March 2019. The project targeted training as well as response times – Staff at both A&E's and in selected nursing homes within the Lewisham community were offered training in a format to suit their working pattern/availability. Training focused on Swallow screening, modified diet & fluids descriptors, and some specific local policies/initiatives. Motivation to trial the project came from 2 Serious Incidents over the previous year of patient's with known dysphagia dying from choking as a result of being given inappropriate food textures (one within A&E) and then need to embed the new IDDSI terminology trust wide which presented a challenge in terms of training and dissemination.

Our aims were:

- Reduce waiting times for SLT assessment in A&E and the community to avoid admission
- Up-skill A&E staff and care home staff in dysphagia awareness and screening.

Outcomes:

There were marked differences between the number of referrals received at QEH compared to UHL and within the community which highlighted the need for further study of the referral reasons and differences and events prior to admission. Staffing capacity limited the ability to meet the target response times at each site however increased presence in A&E and the selected care homes was positively received and improved working relationships.

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