June is Dysphagia Awareness Month

The month of June is one of the most important months as healthcare providers in the field of swallowing and swallowing disorders. As speech pathologists, Dysphagia Awareness Month is a time to reflect on our dysphagia practices, how we want to evolve as swallowing practitioners, and most importantly, a time to celebrate the courage and resilience of our patients living with swallowing and swallowing disorders.

Prevalence of dysphagia is approximately 10%-22% in Americans ages 50 and over

1 in 25 Americans are living with swallowing disorders

Swallowing dysfunction can lead to pneumonia, dehydration and malnutrition

Economic cost is between $4.3 to $7.1 billion in additional hospital costs annually

Dysphagia can impact quality of life due to depression, anxiety and social isolation

What Does Dysphagia Awareness Month Mean to AB-SSD Board Members?

“I have spent the majority of my clinical and research career devoted to improving the lives of individuals with dysphagia. Dysphagia Awareness Month is a wonderful opportunity to continue to increase awareness about a disorder that impacts millions of people, and grateful for organizations - like AB-SSD - that continue to advocate all year long!” - Kendrea Garand-Focht, PhD, CCC-SLP, BCS-S, CBIS, CCRE

“Dysphagia awareness means being able to recognize the struggles and victories that many children and adults go through during their dysphagia journey. As SLPs, we are their medical coaches and partners guiding them through. “- Christina Rappazzo, MA, CCC-SLP, BCS-S

“First of all, I love how Dysphagia Awareness Month was a result of a bipartisan decision in 2008. Fifteen years ago, Congress made a bipartisan decision! Seriously, though, having a month dedicated to Dysphagia Awareness can improve clinical outcomes. As we raise awareness, we are increasing healthcare providers’ knowledge and consideration of difficulties in swallowing (dysphagia) when assessing and managing people in the healthcare system. Because dysphagia is not a disease in-and-of-itself, it must be considered as an issue within many underlying problems. If the healthcare system does not create the necessary protocols for patient safety, then people who have had acute strokes or other serious medical changes do not receive the appropriate screening, evaluations, and treatment. If someone with an acute stroke, for example, is given oral intake and medications by mouth prior to a nursing swallow screen and formal bedside swallowing evaluation (by SLP), then there could be catastrophic events such as pneumonia, intubation, and death. On the research side, having a month dedicated to dysphagia can foster listening when we advocate for increased dysphagia research funding. See the NFOSD’s efforts back in 2013 that highlighted then that only 0.01% of the NIH funding was related to dysphagia.”- Karen Sheffler, MS, CCC-SLP, BCS-S


https://swallowingdisorderfoundation.com/support-this-petition-to-nih-increase-swallowing-disorder-dysphagia-research/

Living with Dysphagia: The Patient Perspective

Ricardo’s Story

“I had never heard about dysphagia, and even though I had evident symptoms that something wasn’t well with my ability to swallow, I never imagined that something like this could ever happen. The fact is that swallowing problems are not just a condition that affect your health, but a huge barrier that threatens our capacity to socialize, to be part of celebrations, participate in normal family life, and even contribute to professional activities. I had to learn what to eat, how to eat, when to eat, and most of the time even knowing all of that, I am still anxious about eating with others.

Besides, dysphagia is not just something that affects patients, but our families and friends too. I’ve been blessed with a family and wife who decided to be part of this, learn with me. They have read everything they could, including cookbooks that explained how to prepare good, healthy, and attractive food, but it hasn’t been easy. I’m grateful that I have them and my medical team with me, so I haven’t been in this journey alone.” - Ricardo Abuauad
Dan’s Story

“My name is Dan Diestel, born in San Francisco, CA and was raised with nine brothers and sisters. I was diagnosed with throat cancer on March 16th, 2016 (age 57). My doctor told me, ‘I’m so sorry, you have cancer’. I looked my doctor right in the eye and said, ‘I’ve got this’. It’s a day I will never forget. Well, after reviewing my PET scan it was discovered that I had an exploded aneurysm in my aorta that needed immediate surgery. The doctors at chose to have me complete the cancer treatment before getting my AAA scheduled. After 36 radiation treatments and 8 rounds of chemo, I graduated from patient to survivor. I met my Speech Pathologist who taught me how to swallow again. Then in March 2018, my lower jaw deteriorated and started to crumble. In November 2018 they needed to remove 5” from my leg bone and reconstruct my lower jaw. Complete with a titanium chain securing my jaw, I was Dan 5.0. It was time to learn how to swallow again. This time I am two years older in a 59 year old body and it was all about chew, chew, chew, and flush with liquid. I ate what I could handle to keep my weight steady at 170 lbs. Things were manageable, sometimes frustrating but hey, what the hell, I was alive.

One night when I was really down and depressed. I started to make a pro versus con list of cancer. Things like ‘Cancer Sucks’ to ‘I'm Alive’ and so on. The list turned out overwhelmingly positive. I was blown away. How could this cancer be positive?! This is about the time I did an art project out of my radiation mask (which I had all my nurses, doctors, techs and all that assisted in my recovery sign upon treatment completion) and my pill containers with a skeleton in a shirt stating, ‘Cancer is Positive’. I painted the pros in green paint on the pill bottles and the cons in red paint on the others and gave my mask dreadlocks. Cancer has taught me so much about what is important in life and that every day is important, so do not waste it.

Things took a dive in January 2020 when I got pneumonia from aspirating. Then I started having more and more trouble swallowing. By the end of the year, aspiration was occurring more and more frequently. We tried several processes to help alleviate the issue, but nothing was working. By March of 2021, I started a 100% liquid diet. Even then, I would need spit buckets everywhere. There were spit buckets at home in each room, at work and in my car. This went on for eight months. I knew my kids (Marli and Tommy) were getting concerned and after discussing things with my medical staff, I chose to have a total laryngectomy performed in November 2021 (I am now 60 years old). I told Tommy and Marli that I would be the same dad but without a voice. My Speech Pathologist got me an electronic voice wand, which I use every day. By January 2022, I was able to say my first words "Bow Wow". This has become our add on to I love you "Bow Wow, I love you". My Laryngologist inserted a TEP allowing me to use my vocal cords again. My Speech Pathologist has been instrumental in teaching me how to use HandsFree HMEs while talking. I still do not have the hands-free part down, but I am more understandable using the HME vs the electronic voice wand. Yes, I miss talking but I have not needed to use my white board for over a year. I have made some adjustments in my life, but I
still run my own business manufacturing mobility accessories for those using wheelchairs and scooters. I still go to live musical performances, hike, and try to keep as I always have done. Social gatherings are challenging, but I do not avoid them. Instead, I get involved the best I can. People around Chico now know me as the guy with the electronic voice. Yeah, I can't eat things that I used to, ‘but eating is overrated’.

I am now 18 months out and I would choose this route every time, over and over. It saved my life. I'm no longer fearful of dying in my sleep, or any other time for that matter, from aspiration. I can't choke on food anymore. I get to love my kids every day.

I love providing anyone a more positive outlook on their situation. "Music, sweet music, makes you feel alright" - Bob Marley. Thank you – Dan Diestel
Upcoming Continuing Education Offerings

Summer is the perfect time to lay out and learn! Check out the AB-SSD Summer Series for exceptional pediatric and adult dysphagia courses:

1. Pediatric Summer Series: There are four pediatric on-demand courses to indulge in. Also, Save The Date for the special one-hour Live Q&A on June 22, 2023, at 7:00 pm CST. You must complete the on-demand courses plus the one-hour live or recording of the Q&A to receive your CEUs.
2. Adult Summer Series: There are five adult on-demand courses, and Save The Date for the adult one-hour Q&A on June 20, at 7:00pm CST.

Thank you to Bracco Diagnostics, Blossom Foods, TIMS Medical, IOPI Medical and True Angle for sponsoring the AB-SSD Summer Series!!

Congratulations to Our New Affiliates
Meredith Pauly
Thomas Jefferson University Hospital
Mentor: Cheryl Lopez

Randy Dubin
Good Shepherd Penn Partners
Mentor: Cesar Ruiz

Marilouise Nichols
Houston Methodist Continuing Care Hospital
Mentor: Veena Kallambettu

Sana Smaoui
Unity Health Toronto-St. Michael’s Hospital

Meredith Stawicki
UC Davis Health
Mentor: Mirabai Bekowies

Lydia Perkins
Methodist University Hospital

Clair Warren
Kennedy Krieger Institute
Mentor: Kathleen Adinolfi

Danielle Busch
Kessler Institute for Rehabilitation
Mentor: Caryn Grabowski

Margaret Homer
LCMC Health-Touro Hospital
Mentor: Darlene Graner

Stephanie Rimroth
US Publish Health Service Corps-Eglin Neurology Clinic
Mentor: Selena Helms-Reece
Elizabeth Norberg
Vanderbilt University Medical Center

Sonya Wintersteen
Promedica Health System
Mentor: Luis Riquelme
May is Pediatric Feeding Awareness Month

Thank you to all the speech pathologists and team members who specialize in feeding and swallowing issues in children of all ages!

Checkout the New AB-SSD Website

Thank you to the AB-SSD’s Public Relations and Communications Committee, Badger Bay, and YourMembership for their dedication and endless work on the revamping the new AB-SSD website. We are excited to roll out our user-friendly and updated website. Check it out as updates will continue at https://www.swallowingdisorders.org/. Thank you, AB-SSD affiliates, in advance for letting us know if you see any necessary edits or links that need to be fixed at info@swallowingdisorders.org.
Welcome to ABSSD's New Look
We are currently under construction. Thank you for your patience while we update our site.