

LETTER OF FEES SUPPORT

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FIBEROPTIC ENDOSCOPIC EVALUATION OF SWALLOWING AS PERFORMED BY SPEECH-LANGUAGE PATHOLOGISTS

SUMMARY

Fiberoptic endoscopic evaluation of swallowing (FEES) as used by the speech-language pathologist (SLP) is for the purpose of a functional evaluation of an individual's swallowing.

FEES is a comprehensive assessment of swallowing. It includes five components:

1. Observation of the anatomy involved in the oropharyngeal stage of swallowing
2. Observation of the movement and sensation of critical structures within the hypopharynx
3. Observation of secretions
4. Direct assessment of swallowing function of food and liquid
5. Response to therapeutic maneuvers and interventions to improve the swallow

The purpose of the procedure is the comprehensive functional evaluation of the oropharyngeal stage of swallowing, leading to recommendations regarding the adequacy of the swallow, the advisability of oral feeding, and the use of appropriate interventions to facilitate safe and efficient swallowing. In the process of this evaluation, if observations of structure or function of the larynx and pharynx suggest the possibility of an undiagnosed medical condition, they are described to the referring physician. The referring physician determines if further medical evaluation is warranted. The procedure is used with adults and children for these evaluation purposes. Endoscopy may also be used in treatment as a therapeutic aid (e.g., to measure the effect of fatigue, to teach specific techniques, to educate patient/family) and to provide biofeedback to the individual with a swallowing disorder.

TRAINING AND COMPETENCE

Speech-language pathologists performing FEES must undergo sufficient training to demonstrate the knowledge and skills needed to perform and interpret the procedure. Each SLP is ethically responsible for achieving the appropriate level of training to provide these services competently. It is recommended that institutions develop a written list of competencies for performing FEES and that an individual's competencies be verified in writing and maintained on file. In some institutions, a credentialing or privileging process may be required. In some states, the use of endoscopy may be specifically addressed by the speech-language pathology licensure law.

According to ASHA's knowledge and skills document referenced above, the following process was recommended in order to acquire skill in performing FEES: 1) observation; 2) practice under direct supervision; and 3) independent practice with indirect supervision. Required knowledge and skills areas were described as:

1. Know normal and abnormal aerodigestive physiology for respiration, airway protection, and swallow.
2. Recognize anatomical landmarks as viewed endoscopically.
3. Recognize altered anatomy as it relates to swallowing function.

4. Recognize changes in anatomy and physiology of the swallow over the life span.
5. Identify the indications and contraindications for an endoscopic exam.
6. Identify the elements of a comprehensive endoscopic swallowing exam.
7. Detect and interpret abnormal findings in terms of the underlying anatomy and pathophysiology.
8. Apply appropriate treatment interventions, implement postural changes, and alter the bolus or method of delivery to determine the effect on the swallow.
9. Use the results of the examination to make appropriate recommendations and to guide treatment of the patient.
10. Make appropriate recommendations or referrals for other examinations as needed.
11. Know when to re-evaluate swallowing function.
12. Use endoscopy as a biofeedback tool and to educate patients, family, and staff using the endoscopic images either during or after the examination.

SKILLS REQUIRED

1. Operate, maintain, and disinfect the equipment needed for an endoscopic examination.
2. Apply topical anesthetic when clinically appropriate and permitted by the licensing regulations of individual states.
3. Insert and manipulate the endoscope in a manner that causes minimal discomfort and prevents unpleasant complications.
4. Manipulate the endoscope within the hypopharynx to obtain the desired view.
5. Direct the patient through appropriate tasks and maneuvers as required for a complete and comprehensive examination.
6. Interpret and document findings in a written report.
7. Formulate treatment and management strategies based on test results.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF FEES FOR SLP'S?

Benefits

- Cost effective
- Portability to bedside
- No radiation
- No Barium which is distasteful to the patient
- Uses actual meal tray items
- Direct viewing of laryngeal functioning for airway protection
- Functional - it simulates natural every day eating
- Quick testing and results
- Used to train the patient via biofeedback
- Assesses secretions management before risking aspiration of a feeding trial

- Better assessment of neurological status (including sensation)
- More detailed rendering of the anatomy than other methodologies
- Reliable in detecting aspiration
- Strong evaluation tool in the establishment of treatment and compensatory strategies

INFORMATION OBTAINED FROM THE FEES EXAMINATION

Findings

- Ability to initiate a prompt swallow
- Timing and direction of movement of the bolus
- Ability to clear the bolus during the swallow
- Presence of pooling and residue of material
- Sensitivity of the pharyngeal/laryngeal structures
- The effect of anatomy on the swallow and the ability to protect and sustain protection of the airway.
- Appropriate postural changes and swallowing maneuvers are attempted to detect problems and enable the examiner to make recommendations regarding optimal interventions to improve the safety and efficiency of the swallow, the advisability of oral feeding, and use of appropriate behavioral strategies that facilitate safe and efficient swallowing.

CLINICAL SETTINGS THAT BENEFIT FROM THE PORTABLE FEES

Facilities

- ICU's
- All patient floors with high acuity patients
- Surgical floors
- Vent/Trach
- Bariatric patients
- Outpatient clinical programs
- Emergency Room
- ENT departments
- Pediatric is a future option
- Outpatient Speech Therapy Programs

REFERENCES

www.asha.org – For additional information regarding FEES procedures

www.optim-llc.com - For information regarding the MobileFEES System

www.secmédicalspeech.com – For information on Consulting and Training in FEES and Videostroboscopy