

Helping Patients Swallow Again

Normal Regional Hospital Website

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The Speech Pathology Department at Norman Regional Hospital's Physical Performance Center has adopted a revolutionary treatment for dysphagia. Dysphagia sufferers experience the partial or total inability to swallow food as a result of stroke, cancer, degenerative disorders, injury to the esophagus or other causes. Approximately 60,000 people die from dysphagia each year, and up to one million new cases of dysphagia are reported in the United States annually.

Doctors at NRH believe a new treatment, known as Vitalstim Therapy, may offer hope to dysphagia patients. The treatment electrically stimulates muscles in the throat. Strategically placed electrodes because swallowing muscles in the esophagus to contract, enabling the patient to relearn swallowing.

Existing treatments focus on speech therapy, patient education and swallowing maneuvers to provide some degree of relief. Acute cases require the pureeing of patient's food or the insertion of a feeding tube.

Doctors believe Vitalstim Therapy will help dysphagia sufferers avoid these unpleasant, sometimes ineffective treatments. The regimen consists of one-hour sessions repeated daily or tri-weekly until proper swallowing patterns are established. Most patients can expect to see dramatic improvement in six to 20 daily sessions.

Steve Wood, a Norman firefighter, underwent Vitalstim Therapy after the right side of his throat became paralyzed due to the removal of a cancerous tumor.

"It made a drastic improvement in my swallowing capabilities," Wood said.

He said he immediately experienced positive results of the therapy and that he would recommend it to anyone who has a swallowing disorder.

Vitalstim could save the nation billions in medical expenditures. The average feeding tube patient spends nearly \$32,000 annually in insurance, Medicare and out-of-pocket expenses for dysphagia treatment. Vitalstim patients spend only about \$2,500. This could amount to billions in savings per year for overburdened hospitals and Medicare budgets.

Clinicians who administer Vitalstim treatments are required to undergo national certification by Chattanooga Group, manufacturer of the new apparatus. The certification earns the clinician two continuing education credits in speech and language pathology, occupational therapy or physical therapy.

Ask your doctor if you may be a candidate for Norman Regional Hospital's Vitalstim treatments.

VitalStim Therapy

Have you ever thought what it would be like not to be able to eat an ice cream cone again or even take a simple drink of water? This is an unfortunate reality for about 15 million people in the United States with a condition known as dysphagia -- partial or total inability to swallow food as a result of a stroke, cancer or other conditions.

Norman Regional Hospital's Physical Performance Center, Inpatient Physical Therapy and Rehabilitation Center have adopted a revolutionary treatment for dysphagia. Doctors at NRH believe a new treatment, known as Vitalstim Therapy, may offer hope to dysphagia patients. The treatment electrically stimulates muscles in the throat. Strategically placed electrodes cause swallowing muscles in the esophagus to contract, enabling the patient to relearn swallowing.

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