

NEW THERAPY FOR SWALLOWING DISORDER OFFERED AT WALNUT HILLS

WALNUT CREEK – Walnut Hills Retirement Community has introduced an innovative new treatment for individuals who suffer from dysphagia, a painful and often debilitating swallowing disorder.

The treatment, known as VitalStim Therapy, uses non-invasive electrical stimulation to help re-educate the throat muscles needed for swallowing and has been cleared for use by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration. The therapy is applied externally and delivers small electrical currents to the neck to stimulate inactive or atrophied swallowing muscles. With repeated therapy, throat muscles are re-trained until the patient reaches an optimum level of swallow function.

“VitalStim Therapy is truly a breakthrough in treating dysphagia,” said Tiffany Baker, Speech and Language Pathologist at Walnut Hills. “Since introducing VitalStim, we have seen some exceptional outcomes that would not have been possible with traditional therapies. Patients have shown substantial improvements in their ability to swallow and have returned to a more normal diet – and a better quality of life – much sooner than we thought possible.”

As many as 15 million Americans suffer from dysphagia, with one million new patients diagnosed annually. The disorder affects 50 to 75 percent of all stroke patients and 60 to 70 percent of patients who undergo radiation therapy for head and neck cancer. Estimates of dysphagia’s prevalence in such neurological diseases as Parkinson’s disease and Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (Lou Gehrig’s disease) run as high as 90 percent.

The condition is especially prevalent among older adults. Studies suggest that up to 75 percent of nursing home residents experience some degree of dysphagia and that as many as half of all Americans over 60 will experience dysphagia at some point after that age. The disorder can lead to complications such as choking, bronchospasm, increased infection rate, chronic malnutrition, life-threatening dehydration, significant weight loss, physical debilitation, social isolation and even death.

“We want to enhance quality of life for older adults on our campus and in our community,” said Jeremy Kauffman, Administrator. “We know that providing the newest treatments and technology is the only way to maximize the abilities of those individuals, whether they are affected by dysphagia or in need of other therapies.”

VitalStim Therapy is available at Walnut Hills on an in-patient and out-patient basis. For more information about dysphagia and VitalStim Therapy at Walnut Hills, contact Merle Miller, Director of Rehabilitation and Nursing, at 330-893-3200, ext. 310.



Tiffany Baker, Speech and Language Pathologist (right), places the VitalStim electrodes on the neck of Therapy Assistant Darlene Lake. Carefully calibrated currents from the electrodes stimulate motor nerves in the throat. With repeated therapy, muscles are re-educated and the quality of the swallowing function improves.

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