

Service Initiative- South Tyneside and Sunderland NHS Foundation Trust

Background

Head and Neck SLT service delivering speech, voice and swallow intervention to patients in South Tyneside and Sunderland (STSFT). Head and neck cancer (HNC) rates in the North-East are higher as levels of deprivation are high and people are more likely to smoke and drink alcohol in excess. Often barriers to attending hospital appointments due to finance, travel time or being too unwell.

Approach

- Flexibility in service delivery model to respond to individual patient needs; aiming to ensure that people receive the right care in the right place for them.
- HNC speech and language therapists at STSFT all have capacity and contractual agreement to provide domiciliary visits to all HNC patients when indicated/requested
- Domiciliary visits can be joint with other members of the HNC team e.g., clinical nurse specialists and community staff e.g., district nurse
- Range of service provision in the community including: laryngectomy rehabilitation, swallowing assessments and palliative and end of life care input for communication and swallowing.

Challenges

Service pressures and capacity to consistently offer domiciliary visits to HNC patients

Co-ordination of visits with other team members when clinically indicated .

Outcome/Impact

- Ensuring that HNC patients get joined-up care at the right time in the optimal care setting
- Flexibility in service delivery to optimise speech and language therapy input
- Individualising the HNC care pathway to the patient and their needs
- Reducing the burden on patients and their families/friends in relation to travel, time and cost of attending multiple hospital appointments
- Opportunity to work collaboratively in the community with other members of the HNC team and community services

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“ Having an appointment at home... after such a long time in hospital, really meant my Mum got the care she needed at the right time in the right place. Being at home meant her appointment was about promoting independence which was her number one issue at that time... it helped seeing her in her own environment too. The flexibility was, and is, still so appreciated for us both, as patient and family member”

Top Tips

Don't be afraid: working into people's own environment as well as the acute setting provides real variety for clinicians and more personalised care for patients. Get in touch – we would be happy to share our experiences!