

Speech and Language Therapy

Children with feeding, eating and drinking difficulties Information for Parents/Carers

The Speech and Language Therapy (SLT) Paediatric Dysphagia service is based at the Royal Alexandra Children's Hospital on Level 5. It is part of the Integrated Child Development and Disability Service.

What we do?

We are a specialised service that works with babies with feeding difficulties and children with eating and drinking difficulties which impact on their safety when swallowing. The medical term for these difficulties is dysphagia. Difficulties experienced by children who have dysphagia can include:

- coughing and choking when eating and drinking
- chest infections
- poor weight gain or weight loss
- severe food refusal.

Dysphagia is usually associated with other medical or developmental difficulties.

How do we assess children?

When a baby or child is referred to our service, they are assessed by

- reviewing medical files
- discussing the baby or child with their parents or carers
- liaising with other professionals involved with their care (e.g. doctors, nurses, dieticians)
- observing the baby or child and if appropriate assessing their sucking, feeding, touching and tasting food and eating and drinking
- trying strategies to see if these help the baby or child.

At the end of the assessment a plan will be developed with parents/carers that may include:

- recommendations to ensure the baby or child's safety will be discussed with parents and other professionals
- advice on strategies to improve and develop their skills
- ongoing monitoring
- referral to other services – including a specialised x-ray swallowing assessment clinic or Videofluoroscopy Swallow Study service for children suspected of having severe swallowing difficulties. This service is conducted with a Consultant Radiologist. The Videofluoroscopy Swallow Studies are done in the x-ray department on Level 4 of the Royal Alexandra Children's Hospital.

Some babies and children are seen jointly with other professionals in clinics, such as the Nutrition Round, Bronchopulmonary Dysplasia Clinic and the Joint Feeding Clinic.

Visits are also conducted to some services and schools for children with special needs. Children attending these services and schools with eating and drinking difficulties are monitored through these visits wherever possible.

Advice is offered over the phone to speech and language therapists and other professionals working with babies with feeding difficulties and children with eating and drinking difficulties.

Who do we see?

We provide assessment, intervention and support to babies and children and their families who have moderate to severe feeding or eating and drinking difficulties and:

- are inpatients on the Trevor Mann Baby Unit or maternity wards at the Royal Sussex County Hospital
- are inpatients at the Royal Alexandra Children's Hospital
- reside in the Brighton and Hove area
- do not reside in the Brighton and Hove area but are seen regularly by a consultant from the Royal Sussex County Hospital or the Royal Alexandra Children's Hospital and one other professional
- have or are suspected of having severe swallowing difficulties and require a Videofluoroscopy Swallow Study (vfss) and are under a BSUH Consultant, an affiliated Child Development Centre or Chailey Heritage Clinical Services.

Referrals can be made by any professional working with the child through calling or writing to the department. Parental/carer consent must be obtained prior to the referral.

Children with communication needs who are an inpatient at the Royal Alexandra Children's Hospital will be provided with input in the area of communication through advice to parents and staff caring for these children. Currently this service does not have the capacity to provide direct input to children with communication needs.

How we work with others?

- **Parents:** We work directly with parents by obtaining information on the baby or child's abilities and difficulties and their concerns. We help parents with understanding their baby or child's feeding or eating and drinking abilities and difficulties and how best to help them by ensuring their safety and well-being while developing their skills further.
- **Other professionals:** We will liaise with any professional working with the baby or child regarding their feeding or eating and drinking and related areas, this may be done through letters and/or discussion. Some children are seen jointly with other professionals on ward rounds or in a variety of clinics. This is called the multi-disciplinary team approach and is essential to ensure that the child's complex health needs are fully understood by all and appropriate care is provided.

Confidentiality:

The information you give us is kept confidential to the Speech and Language Therapy Department but will be shared with other professionals involved with your child to help plan the best care for your child. All information is shared on a "need to know" basis and everyone will act professionally with the information you give us. We will use some of the information for monitoring purposes to make sure we are offering the right service to meet local needs. In special circumstances we may need to share information with other professionals, for example, to keep a child safe. Where possible we will tell you what we are sharing.

Comments and complaints

We welcome comments and complaints as they will help us to provide a better service. We also like to hear from you if you have had a particularly good service. Please contact the patient advice and liaison service (PALS), Telephone: 01273 242292, Email: sc-tr.serviceexperience@nhs.net, Address: Sussex Community NHS Foundation Trust, FREEPOST (BR117), Elm Grove, Brighton BN2 3EW.

For further information please contact the department on:

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Phone: 01273 696955 extension 2527
