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SWALLOWING pioneer Sumathi Sinnappan

Don't be phased by swallowing trouble

EXCLUSIVE
by MATT JONES

AN INTERNATIONAL clinician is pioneering a new treatment in North Wales to help those suffering from a disease that affects the ability to swallow.

Specialist speech language therapist Sumathi Sinnappan is using Vitalstim, a new non-invasive technique, to treat dysphagia on a St Asaph patient.

This is the first time this treatment has ever been used in the UK.

Conventional treatments require patients to be fed through a tube in their mouths or in some cases through the nose. Others can only survive by ingesting protein and calories through supplements such as pre-thickened liquids and food thickeners.

Mrs Sinnappan said: "It is a condition which affects the patient's ability to swallow. It can be contracted after a stroke, brain injury, Parkinson's Disease and Multiple Sclerosis. It can also occur in old age, but children

can also have the disease."

Swallowing involves a process of voluntary and involuntary actions. Once food gets to the back of the throat the process becomes involuntary, and suffers of dysphagia have varying levels of problems at this stage.

Mrs Sinnappan said: "The new treatment is non-invasive and very safe. Electrodes are placed on the throat which provide neuromuscular electro-stimulation. After the treatment the patient improves in terms of the quantity of food they can swallow and the quality of food they can eat. This has a huge impact on the quality of life of the patients."

"I've seen results within 24-48 hours that are amazing, voice level increases, lung capacity increases and the awareness of what food is in the mouth also increases."

After receiving the treatment patients can go from being fed through a tube, which can result in death by choking, to being able to swallow some foods.

However, the improvement varies with each individual case and is linked to the

severity of the condition. Treatment is ongoing, and can range from having 30-60 minutes sessions, every day or three times a week.

There is still a lack of understanding about the disease. Mrs Sinnappan said: "Imagine what it would be like not to be able to take food through your mouth, but have to take it through a tube into your nose. There are cases of sufferers who cannot swallow their own saliva."

"For sufferers of the disease the main problem is self-esteem, eating is such a social activity. You will never know how important it is to be able to swallow until you lose the ability to do it."

There are an estimated 97,000 sufferers in the UK. The treatment is already widely available in other countries including America, where there are 15million dysphagia sufferers, and is over three-times cheaper than traditional treatments.

The NHS, as well as a private company, will be purchasing equipment to provide the treatment in the coming months.

Mediaeval costume displays

A GERMAN student taking part in an European work exchange programme has designed a display of mediaeval costumes that will be exhibited across Denbighshire.

Llangollen.

Sandra is now due to return to Germany where she will embark on a course in fashion journalism at Berlin University in September. Sandra took part in the Leonardo da Vinci

website