

Factors and Information Related to Nurses Administering Medication to Patients with Dysphagia: A Pilot Study



Abigail DuBois B.A., Ashley Atkins B.S., Abbey Lovelace B.S., and Aspen Mickles B.S.

Longwood University



Faculty Advisors: Shannon Salley, SLP.D., CCC-SLP, Kellyn Hall, Ph.D., CCC-SLP

Abstract

Nurses are faced with the challenge of ensuring the safety of their patients during administration of medication. Results from past studies has shown a lack of education and preparation of nurses to administer medication to patients with dysphagia as well as a trend of nurses employing inconsistent methods when administering patient medication. Since a specific set of skills and knowledge is required for proper administration of medication to patients with dysphagia, this research was conducted to bring awareness to what factors or information nurses draw upon when making informed decisions about administering medication to patients with dysphagia. Results revealed inconsistencies and room for error in the administration process. These findings can bring awareness to current methods that nurses utilize when having a patient with dysphagia and suggest an area for further education and training.

Research Questions

1. What patient factors or information do nurses draw upon for safe medication administration?
2. Are nursing students being taught about administering medication to patients with dysphagia in their college course work?

Methods, Materials, and Procedures

1. Participants were presented a short survey and two case studies that contained different scenarios about administering medication to patients with varying levels of dysphagia. Each patient in the case studies required specific care that nurses should consider when forming judgements about how to administer medication. Throughout the survey and case studies process, nurses were asked to draw upon their knowledge of different factors and other information when reporting what influenced them to safely administer medication.
2. The questionnaire included 15 questions created on Survey Monkey that assessed what the nursing students and current nurses knew about the oral administration of medication. These questions were created based on current research and publications related to the topic and included information about what protocols are taught and used. These questions focused on the process of preparing the medication as well as the actual administration of the medication.
3. The survey also included two case studies where participants were asked to consider specific scenarios when making decisions about medication administration.
4. The questionnaire was sent out over email to Longwood students who are currently enrolled in the RN to BSN program and participants were allowed to take as long as they needed to answer the questions.

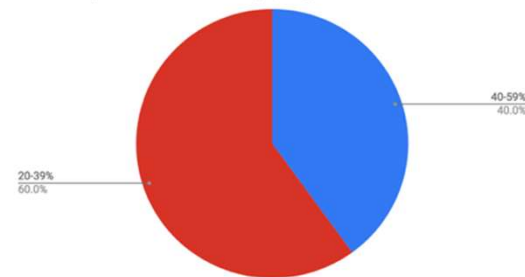
References

- Adult Dysphagia: Overview. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://www.asha.org/PRPSpecificTopic.aspx?folderid=85899425&ion=Overview>
- Kelly, J., Wright, D., (2010) *Administering medication to adult patients with dysphagia: part two*. Nursing Standard. 24, 26, 61-68.
- Murry, T., Carrau, R., & Chan, K. (2016). *Clinical management of swallowing disorders*. 4th ed.
- Perry, A. G., Potter, P. A., & Ostendorf, W. R. (2018). *Clinical nursing skills & techniques* (9th ed.). St. Louis, MO: Elsevier.
- Stubbs, J., Haw, C., & Dickens, G. (2008). Dose form modification – a common but potentially hazardous practice: A literature review and study of medication administration to older psychiatric inpatients. *International Psychogeriatrics*, 20(3), 616-627. doi:10.1017/S1041610207006047
- Qian S, Yu P, Hailey D, Wang N, Bhattacharjee A. Medication administration process in a residential aged care home: An observational study. *J Nurs Manag*. 2018;26:1033–1043. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jonm.12632>

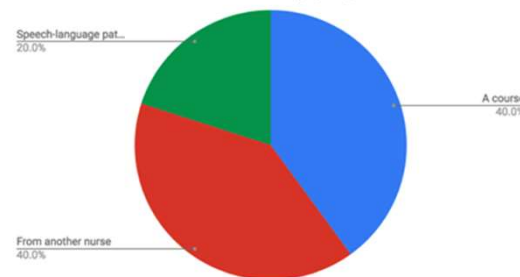
Participants

The participants in this study included Longwood University students who were currently enrolled in the RN (registered nurse) to BSN (Bachelor of Nursing) program. These participants are currently practicing as registered nurses and are taking additional classes in order to obtain a BSN degree. All work settings were included in participant criteria (Acute care, Long-term care, and in-patient). Participants also demonstrated various level of experience.

Percentage of Patients with Dysphagia on Nurses Caseload



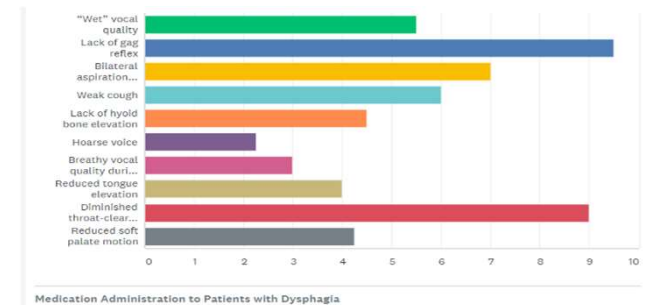
How Nurses Have Learned About Dysphagia



Results

- Suggest that there are inconsistencies in the protocols and information that nurses are taught regarding administration of medication to patients with dysphagia.
- Revealed that nurses are most likely to reach out to dietitians or nutritionists for guidance when providing services to patients with dysphagia.
- The participants also stated that they would seek help from other nurses, radiologist, rehab medicine individuals, and social workers.
- Sixty percent of participants stated that they would not seek out help for patients with dysphagia.
- Eighty percent of participants answered that they would crush and administer medication through applesauce or pudding thick liquid.
- Twenty percent of participants stated that they would crush and administer medication through a G-Tube.
- When asked about what factors to take into consideration for administering medication, respondents reported the following as the most important factors: bed position, pill size, patient's diet, and diagnosis.

The following graph shows what nurses believe are the most important considerations when administering medication.



Discussion

This pilot study revealed inconsistencies among nurses regarding their education about dysphagia, which points to the inconsistency in how they treat patients with dysphagia. Although most of the participants did not feel completely confident in their abilities to safely administer medication to patients with dysphagia, 80% said they would not seek out help. The 20% of participants that would seek guidance indicated that they would refer to dietitians, other nurses, radiologists, rehab medicine, and social workers even though these professionals may not give the best information regarding medication administration to patients with dysphagia. For example, speech-language pathologists are taught that a gag reflex has no impact on the individual's ability to swallow. However all participants selected the absence of gag reflex as one of their main concerns when reviewing the case studies. Furthermore, one of the case studies included a patient who required time release medication but also aspirated on thin liquids. One hundred percent of the participants stated that they would crush the medication in order to administer it. This information is concerning as it puts the patient with dysphagia at risk because time released medication should not be crushed.

This pilot student highlights the need for speech-language pathologists to provide in-service learning opportunities to help nurses and other medical professionals better understand the impact of dysphagia on patient safety with all PO intake, including their medications. Furthermore, results from the pilot study suggest a collaboration among training programs at the university level is needed to ensure new professionals are aware of resources they have readily available in their job setting when unsure about how to safely proceed with patients with dysphagia.

