



From left: Michelle Farquar, Amanda Scott, Tanya Blyth and Annabelle Bond. Tanya received the 2008 RACV Sir Edmund Herring Memorial Scholarship.



SPEECH PATHOLOGY

Manager: Rachel McGrath BAppSci(Speech Pathology)

CURRENT PROJECTS

The effective assessment of high level cognition based communication disorders in traumatic brain injury (TBI)

Funded by the RACV Sir Edmund Herring Memorial Scholarship, this study commenced in February 2009 and aims to determine the best way to assess whether there are any mild cognitive communication difficulties in people who have had a mild TBI. Patients who have had a TBI will be recruited from the Trauma and Neurosurgery Units at The Alfred to participate in this study. Two different tests of high level cognitive function will be given: one by a speech pathologist and the other by an occupational therapist.

The study will look at whether there is a relationship between any cognitive communication problems and the location of the brain injury and the immediate symptoms after the injury. The results of this research have the potential to change the way in which patients with TBI are assessed and improve the identification of problems. Recommendations of the project will be discussed with key stakeholders of the Trauma and Neurosurgery Units. A policy will then be developed and rolled out, with education sessions outlining how patients with TBI will be assessed.

Ongoing review of swallowing and nutrition of head and neck cancer patients

In 2005, the Speech Pathology Department received a Southern Melbourne Integrated Cancer Service research grant to develop a database to follow the swallowing and nutritional outcomes after treatment for head and neck cancer. This project addressed a gap in the data for Australian head and neck clinical populations concerning the swallowing and nutritional outcomes following surgery, radiotherapy, chemotherapy or combined modality treatments.

The database now includes data from over 150 patients and specifically examines the implications of site and severity of tumour, the impact of treatment modalities on outcomes and the patterns of side effects. These data have already influenced the type and timing of speech pathology intervention and have provided information regarding enteral nutrition requirements.

The project has developed to become a collaborative multisite project involving speech pathology and nutrition departments across three Melbourne metropolitan sites: The Alfred, Monash Medical Centre and Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre. This will enable services and outcomes to be benchmarked and the outcomes of new and current practice to be evaluated.

Review of speech pathology requirements post-anterior cervical discectomy and fusion (ACDF)

Swallowing and voice problems post-ACDF have been documented in the literature. ACDF procedures are frequently performed by the Neurosurgery and Trauma Units; however, the Speech Pathology Department had no guidelines for their involvement with this patient group.

This project aimed to identify the percentage of patients requiring speech pathology intervention and to describe the type and extent of problems found. The voice and swallowing functions of patients were assessed post-ACDF and, in some cases, pre-ACDF. It was found that 90% of patients had either a swallowing or voice problem immediately post-surgery that required speech pathology services. Of these patients, 50% had not been recognised by nursing or medical staff as requiring speech pathology intervention. Whilst most of the problems were transient, 28% still required speech pathology intervention at the time of discharge.

In response to these findings the Speech Pathology Department developed management guidelines. All ACDF patients are to be reviewed post-surgery and all patients will be provided with appropriate intervention, an information brochure and contact details for speech pathology services should their problems persist.



Speech pathologist Gulsen Pasa wears a protective lead gown and thyroid protector while conducting a videofluoroscopy swallowing assessment.