



Media release

Wellington Street, Perth Western
Australia 6000
Tel: (08) 9224 3943 Fax: (08) 9224 3447

July 15, 2007

No choking matter – Speech Pathology Week 2007

When Liz Dutton had a stroke in July 2006 her whole world came crashing down.

Prior to her stroke, Liz, now aged 31, had worked in the hospitality industry for 14 years so she was well accustomed to the pleasures of good food and wine.

But as a result of the stroke she lost the ability to eat normally and had to be fed through a tube in her stomach. This also ended her ability to experience the flavour and texture of foods and had a huge impact on her life.

Senior Speech Pathologist Jade Cartwright, who has worked with Liz for several months, said: “This highlights that swallowing is not only vital for our survival, but can impact on many facets of our everyday life.”

“It is easy to take something as simple as enjoying a good cup of coffee for granted”.

Dysphagia, or difficulty swallowing, can arise from a range of medical conditions, including stroke, neurological disease, head injury, congenital syndromes, intellectual disabilities, degenerative disease, neuromuscular disease, craniofacial abnormalities and following head and neck surgery.

Speech pathology plays a big part in rehabilitating someone who has suffered dysphagia.

Interestingly, the same muscles and nerves we use to speak are also involved in swallowing, which helps explain why speech pathologists have become specialists in both areas.

Working as part of a multi disciplinary team, these potentially life-threatening disorders are now considered one of a speech pathologist’s vital roles.

After weeks of treatment with Jade and Senior Speech Pathologist Liz Swift from SCGH, Liz has retrained the brain pathways and muscles required to swallow.

Jade said: "Liz gradually commenced eating and drinking modified diet and fluids. While she would have preferred a glass of fine wine, she informed us that she drank thickened fluids "with glee" after having had nothing to eat or drink for over a month. This was an important step in her recovery".

"Originally they thought I'd die. Then they thought I'd never speak or move again. Now everything is a bonus", says patient Liz.

Liz has now returned to eating and drinking normal food and liquids, although making careful choices about what dishes has become important.

"I try to order food that I can eat without disrupting other patrons or embarrassing myself by coughing, although every now and again I think bugger it," she said.

One year exactly after having her stroke Liz says: "This sort of thing really shows you what life is. Things you won't place priority on. Like everyone is so busy – career, money, whatever, you don't think about how important it is just to be able to tell your daughter you love her."

"It makes you reorganise what's important to you. It completely alters your perspective".

Liz identifies her 10 year old daughter Ella as a major motivator during her admission, never allowing her to give up hope.

During the road to recovery Liz has also begun writing her own book. She hopes to share her experiences and offer support to others in similar situations.

"I want to let them know that others have been there. There is not a lot of literature about my kind of stroke. Many people who have it are locked in forever," she said.

"Feeding and Swallowing: It's no choking matter" is the theme of the 2007 Speech Pathology Week (July 22-28). For further information about how Speech Pathologists can help individuals with speech and swallowing disorders you can visit the web site for Speech Pathology Australia, the national association for Speech Pathologists at www.speechpathologyaustralia.org.au

RPH Media Contact: Dennis Bertoldo, 9224 2209