

Dysphagia Policy: Consultation Provides Insight

The College's *Dysphagia Policy* (2007), was recently updated to reflect current dietetic practice. The new policy, *Scope of Practice for Registered Dietitians Caring for Clients with Dysphagia in Ontario* (2016), was circulated to members for their comments from September to October 2015. The policy was revised to reflect the comments received by RDs and approved by Council in February 2016.

We would like to express our sincere appreciation to all the RDs who responded to the dysphagia policy consultation. Your input provided valuable insight into the critical issues surrounding the assessment and management of dysphagia. Your input helped to create a policy that reflects current practice in Ontario. Thank you.

Access the new policy at www.collegeofdietitians.org. Enter "dysphagia policy" in the search box.

NEW POLICY STATEMENTS

1. Dysphagia is a nutrition-related disorder and, therefore, aspects of dysphagia screening, assessment, treatment and management are within the scope of practice of Registered Dietitians (RDs) in Ontario.
2. RDs must be competent to do what they do at every phase of the practice, whether at entry or highly-developed practice.
3. A Registered Dietitian's role in a dysphagia assessment and management is defined by the needs of the client, the interprofessional resources and the environment in which care is provided.

4. In assessing swallowing disorders and the management of dysphagia, RDs have the same professional responsibilities as for other areas of clinical practice: providing safe dietetic practice.

The updated policy statements:

- Clarify the scope of practice of Registered Dietitians in Ontario who care for clients with dysphagia;
- Set out the College's expectations regarding managing risks and identifying and implementing the best protective solutions for safe, client-centered services; and
- Clarify the full role of the RD within a dysphagia team.

COMPETENCIES FOR DYSPHAGIA ASSESSMENT AND MANAGEMENT

To address specific knowledge or skills that could be broken down further to enhance clarity or assign it to a different level of practice, a pan-Canadian working group, formed by

PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE SCENARIO

Scope of Practice and Assessing Dysphagia

An RD was asked by her manager to complete a bedside swallowing assessment to determine if a resident with slowly declining end-stage Alzheimers was "unsafe to feed". This resident had a long-standing history of chest congestion and frequent suctioning to facilitate breathing. The staff was concerned about feeding this resident because he was constantly gurgling while feeding. The RD informed her manager that she was comfortable assessing and determining if the resident was high risk for aspiration but was not sure if it was in her scope of practice to do so. The RD wrote a note for the physician to assess the resident and to make a decision based on his medical expertise.

Did the RD approach this situation correctly?

Assessing and managing dysphagia is within the dietetic scope of practice. However, RDs must ensure that they have the appropriate education, practical training and mentorship

the provincial dietetic regulators, is developing competencies for dysphagia assessment and management. The general mandate of this working group will be to coordinate the development of comprehensive competencies for dysphagia assessment and management in dietetic practice in Canada. The competencies will reflect current practice and set out the profession's expectations of competent practice for dietitians who engage in this area of practice. Members and interprofessional colleagues will have an opportunity to provide feedback and validate these competencies. The College will notify members of related dysphagia competencies as they become available.

DYSPHAGIA POLICY QUIZ

Once you have read the policy you can test your knowledge by completing the Dysphagia Policy Quiz at <http://www.collegeofdietitiansofontariosurveys.com/s/Quiz/Dysphagia/>

to provide safe, competent dysphagia management.

When performing any task or function related to dysphagia, RDs have a duty to assess whether they can accomplish this safely and effectively both. If the RD determines that she does not have the necessary training to perform the swallow assessment, then it is correct to ask another authorized and capable healthcare provider, such as a physician, to perform the assessment.

However, if the client's needs would be better served by having an RD perform this task, then the RD must consider expanding her personal abilities to acquire the expertise needed to perform swallowing assessments in the future. Embracing new tasks in the interest of client needs and safety is an important part of decision and planning around mitigating risk of harm.

In situations where RDs are working alone or with limited access to an interprofessional team, they should develop collaborative care and communication strategies in order to provide safe dysphagia care.