

ABSTRACT

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Title: IMPACT OF THE METHOD OF DYSPHAGIA ASSESSMENT ON CLINICAL OUTCOMES IN VETERANS WITH AMYOTROPHIC LATERAL SCLEROSIS

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Summary: Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS) is a progressive and fatal neuromuscular disease that may result in dysphagia. Overall, the impact of dysphagia on patients with ALS can increase symptoms or worsen pre-existing symptoms. This study will investigate relationships between type of dysphagia assessment and clinical outcomes. The methods of assessment include objective and palliative and a screening tool: objective testing, palliative care, and the Yale Swallow Protocol. Objective testing is considered a formal evaluation like a Fiberoptic Endoscopic Evaluation of Swallowing and the Modified Barium Swallow. Objective testing has been considered the gold standard in dysphagia assessment; however, it can impact quality of life. Palliative care is regarded as a symptom management approach, generally with no formal swallowing evaluation. Therefore, medical personnel, such as speech-language pathologists, must carefully consider patient quality of life in deciding assessment method. Evidence-based practice in this area is particularly important to ensure clinicians can maximize the quality of life of patients while maintaining patient symptoms.

Methods: This retrospective chart review of 63 veterans with ALS at the West Haven Veteran's Affairs ALS clinic investigated 31 different clinical correlates and compared them to method of dysphagia assessment. Fisher's Exact test and the non-parametric Mann Whitney were used for quantitative analysis.

Results: Results demonstrated statistically significant associations between method of assessment and diet compliance, adverse clinical outcomes, ALS Functional Rating Scale and patient complaint of difficulty swallowing. There was no statistically significant association for method of assessment and functional swallow status. However, there were statistically significant associations that show patients who are objectively evaluated had a lower diet compliance, more adverse outcomes, and a lower mean difference from initial and final ALS-FRS scores. This study provided interesting preliminary insights on the impact of the method of dysphagia assessment on clinical outcomes for patients with ALS.