

Dysphagia NI

Medications Management

April 2021



Reader Information:

Theme Management of medicines for patients with swallowing difficulties

Document Purpose For Information – regional report of Dysphagia NI

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Target Audience Health and Social Care Directors, Chief Executives of HSC Board and Trusts in Northern Ireland, Health Care professionals, academics, RQIA, NISCC and regional stakeholders.

Main Uses of Document Information presented in this document helps to meet the information needs of a wide range of internal and external users. To inform and monitor related policies.

PHA HSCT Dysphagia Project

Assessment and Management work stream – October 2020

Report October 2020

Management of medicines for patients with swallowing difficulties

Background

In 2018 a thematic review of choking was undertaken in Northern Ireland of serious adverse incidents reported between May 2010 and April 2016.

In response to the thematic review of choking, a regional adult swallowing difficulties steering group was established to oversee a work plan, which sets out key priorities and actions for change. A regional group of multidisciplinary and multiagency professionals, organisations and service users was established to oversee the work of the project. This work was separated into 4 areas, each of which consisted of a work stream with 2 co-chairs:

- Awareness
- Identification
- Assessment and Management
- IDDSI

Focus groups with key stakeholders (HSC staff, nursing homes and domiciliary care providers) were held in January to June 2018 to further understand the issues in supporting adults with dysphagia in Northern Ireland.

A number of issues have been identified in relation to the management of medication for adults with a swallowing difficulty.

Feedback from focus groups in relation to medication was reviewed and key issues were identified:

- Guidance on medication/storage for people who have swallowing difficulties
- Electronic system for the information to be easily accessed
- Additional information requested re thickening products
- Medication being available in the right formats- guidance was requested
- Support for reviewing the medication

Purpose:

To identify if regional good practice guidance for the management of medication in adults with swallowing difficulties was available and identify any gaps / plan to address these.

Objectives:

- Respond to feedback from focus groups and workshops held in relation to swallowing difficulties.
- To identify if regional good practice guidance for the management of medication in adults with swallowing difficulties was available.
- To scope the awareness across professions in the region regarding any existing regional guidance.
- To identify areas where there are gaps in guidance and address if possible.
- To make recommendations regarding increasing awareness of guidance.

Method

- 1 Advice was sought from the regional multi-professional Assessment and Management work stream in regard to a work plan to achieve the objectives.

- 2 Discussion took place with the Lead Pharmacist at the HSCB to seek advice and strategic direction to address the identified needs.
- 3 A small virtual working group was established with key pharmacists in senior positions across different HSC agencies.

This included:

- Paula King Lead Pharmacist Regional Medicines and Poisons Information Service RMPIS BHSCT
- Brenda Bradley Pharmacy Lead – Medicines Governance and Public Health HSCB
- Julie Magee Senior Pharmacist NHST
- Kevin Madden MOOP Specialist Pharmacist for Care homes SEHST
- Sandra Aitcheson Assistant Director of Nursing PHA
- Cathy Jordan Head of Speech and Language Therapy Services BHSCT

- 4 The following was established by this working group in regard to

Objectives 2, 3 & 4.

a) There is existing information/ advice regarding medication for people who have swallowing difficulties on the NI formulary website which had been developed by the Regional Medicines and Poisons Information Service:

Link from April 2020 <https://niformulary.hscni.net>

b) It was agreed by the working group that the information provided is useful and would appear to address many of the issues identified in relation to the management of medication for adults with swallowing difficulties.

- c) Feedback for the focus groups suggested that awareness of this resource is minimal.
- d) The focus group had identified a gap in the regional guidance regarding thickening agents/products. The Lead Pharmacist Regional Medicines and Poisons Information Service agreed to write further guidance to try to address this gap.
- e) In order to understand better the awareness and /or lack of awareness of this site and potential value, feedback was required from pharmacists, doctors (GPs and acute physicians), dietitians, nurses and speech and language therapists and other professions as appropriate.

Method

A questionnaire aimed to scope awareness of the current resource was developed and issued to staff across the HSC and private sector via Survey Monkey. This also asked for recommendations of how this information could be disseminated in the future. This was circulated on 18th Oct 2019 for return on the 13th Nov 2019.

This was circulated to the following for dissemination across their professional areas and to relevant others in their networks.

- Trust Heads of Pharmacy, CPNI and the Practice Based Pharmacist lead
- Directors of nursing for cascading
- AHP leads for cascading
- Link to the regional Heads of SLT services forum
- Link to the regional Heads of Nutrition and Dietetic services forum
- Link to the regional Physiotherapy services forum
- Regional virtual Multidisciplinary reference group re Adults with swallowing difficulties

Summary of survey results (full survey in Appendix 1)

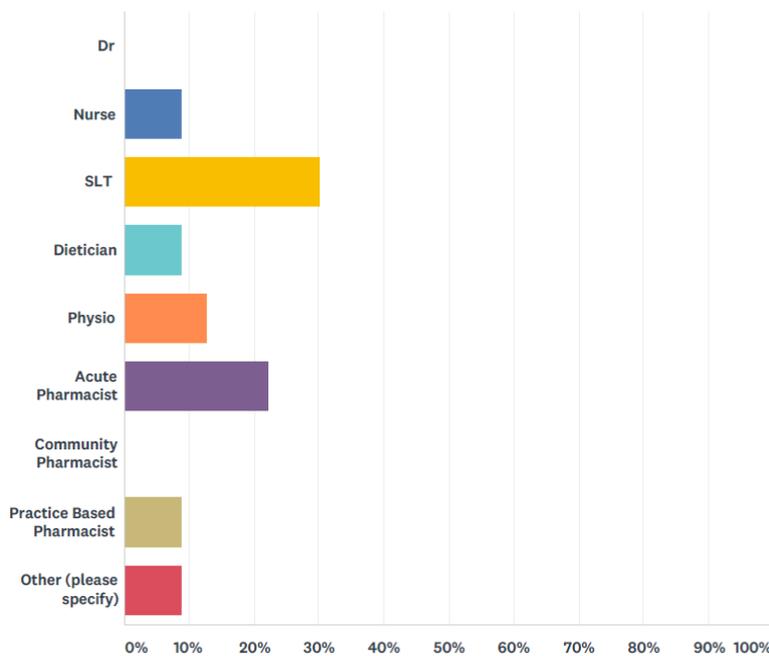
There was a good response rate with 125 responses were received with a good

Professional mix of respondents.

Northern Ireland Regional Swallowing Difficulties Project 2019

Q1 Please state your profession?

Answered: 126 Skipped: 3



Pharmacists made up approximately 33% of the respondents – these were from acute and practice/ federation based pharmacists. Unfortunately no response was received from the community pharmacists.

AHPs staff completed 51% of the surveys; with SLTs being the top responders at 30 %.

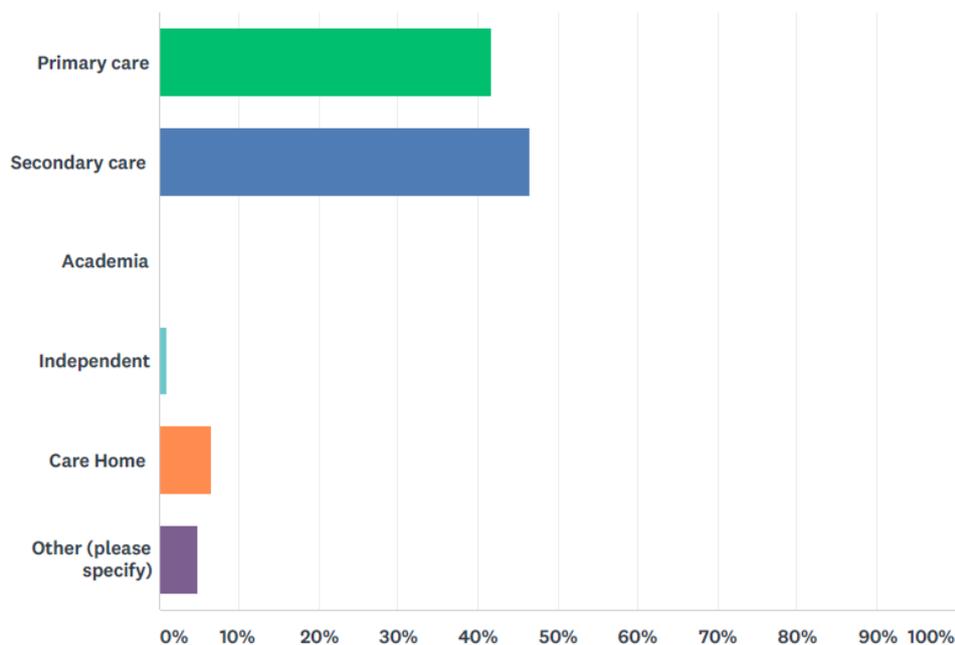
There was a small response from nurses making up approx. 9.5% of the responses.

Area of practice.

Northern Ireland Regional Swallowing Difficulties Project 2019

Q2 What is your main area of practice?

Answered: 125 Skipped: 4



There was a good response from both primary/community services (41.6 %) and secondary care (46.4 %) with a small response from the nursing homes.

Awareness of the information

77 % stated they were not aware of the information on the NI Formulary website and only 8% had the link displayed in their work location.

Usefulness

There was a very positive response to the information with 91% stating they would find the information useful.

The top 3 reasons for how this information would be useful were:

- To give advice 41%
- Useful information to give awareness of options 29%
- Assist in liaison for prescribing 9%

Suggestions - how awareness of this information could be improved:

The respondents gave lots of suggestion of how the awareness could be improved with many people giving several suggestions.

All of the ideas were collected

	% of all ideas (of 165)	% of respondents (of 112)
Information on Trust Intranet	25%	37%
Email / Flyer – Trust wide – pharmacy – nursing homes – GPs	19%	28.5%
General information day	5.5 %	8%
Newsletter	5%	7%
Link through professional bodies	5%	7%
Available on wards/ clinical rooms	5%	7%
On an app	3.5%	5.5%
Other ideas	32%	

Additional pieces of information which would be useful in the guidance

57% of respondents did not identify any additional information that would be useful to develop in the future

The most requested additional information was for thickeners / thickening of medication 9 %. This had already been identified by the focus groups and is being addressed through objective 4.

When asked about other guidance that may be useful 10 % of respondents advised that the NEWT or NEEMMC guidelines were available.

Signposting to Dysphagia resources

When asked specifically in regard to the usefulness of a newsletter signposting staff to general dysphagia resources 90 % of respondents thought this would be useful.

Limitations of survey

The survey was not sent directly through medical workforce lines although it was sent to some medical staff through the virtual reference group and other networks – no responses were received from any doctors.

Nursing homes were not specifically targeted and this is reflected in only 9 % of the responses being from this sector.

There seemed to be a limitation in using this format of survey by the community pharmacists and so no responses were received.

There was a limited response from nursing colleagues.

Discussion

While there were limitations in the circulation of the survey some conclusions can be drawn which could apply across all professional groups.

From the survey there is clearly identified need for this resource but there is limited awareness that this resource is available.

Whilst 91 % of staff found the information useful, only 22% had been aware of this resource.

Many of the respondents had ideas for raising awareness.

Respondents would value additional information and guidance about use of thickening products/agents.

In Response to survey the following actions were completed

1. *To supplement this current information resource with additional information regarding thickening agents*

Significant work has been undertaken by the NI Regional Medicines and Poisons Information Service (RMPIS) in conjunction with Pharmacy colleagues in other parts of the UK in 2020 to address issues raised by NI Dysphagia reference group and survey.

Thickening Agents Q&A have now been published.

Three national UK Medicines Information UKMi national medicines Q&A have been written. This work was completed and the first Q&A was published 14th September 2020.

- **Q&A 1 [Thickening agents: what to consider when choosing a product?](#)**
- **Q&A 2 How can people who need thickened fluids take medicines?**
- **Q&A 3 Thickening agents and thickened fluids: do they interact with medicines?**

Link to View:

<https://www.sps.nhs.uk/articles/thickening-agents-what-to-consider-when-choosing-a-product/>

The NI Formulary will also signpost to these Q&A resources from September 2020.

The background to the Regional Medicines Information Service participation in the NI Dysphagia Group work and contribution to the Medication Task and Finish Group was briefly described in an iPoster presentation 'Information That Is Easy to Swallow'. This was presented at the 46th national Medicines Information UKMi virtual conference on Tuesday 15th September, winning the best iPoster award! The iPoster highlights the collaboration with the NI Dysphagia Group and the new national guidance -UKMi medicine Q&As September 2020 -use of thickening agents and thickening agents and medicines.

The Dysphagia e-Bites 3rd Edition also includes information on the iPoster and the publication of the three thickening agents Q&As.

2. *For greater awareness across the sector of the current resource*

Work to address this need was progressed in consultation with Pharmacy colleagues in HSCB:

- The existing guidance has been prioritised within the NI Formulary Guidance links section with a new title supported by a visual image for greater impact.
- The NI Formulary Guidance links section will also signpost to the UKMi national medicines Q&As on thickening agents from late September 2020.
- A communication plan to promote the resources on the NI formulary website has been developed and will be progressed in line with the new information being added about thickening agents and thickening agents and medicines.

- Promotional material was designed and printed and will be distributed across the HSC and care sectors.
- The work was presented through a poster presentation at UK Medicines Information (UKMi) network conference 15th September 2020
- A link to <https://niformulary.hscni.net> has been included in the regional dysphagia training information

Recommendations regarding work to be taken forward in the future

1. Continue to raise awareness of the medicines information guidance on the <https://niformulary.hscni.net> Staff in HSC and care facilities in NI should be directed to this resource.
2. A link to this resource should be included in any future training programmes in regard to Dysphagia
3. A link to the UKMi medicines Q&A resources on thickening agents should be included on the Swallow Aware website.
4. Inclusion of information regarding medication for people with swallowing difficulties should be considered in all relevant professional undergraduate training programmes.
5. Links established with QUB postgraduate pharmacy programme to inform future curriculum planning and inclusion of Dysphagia 2021/2022.

Note: The need for ongoing medication review for patients with swallow difficulties using special consistencies of medication was identified by the focus groups in 2018.

This was not addressed by this work and it is hoped it will be picked in future.

Project Leads: Sandra Aitcheson and Cathy Jordan on behalf of the working group