

CFAHR Evidence Brief

Implementing telepractice services for adult dysphagia: service outcomes, costs and consumer satisfaction

Authors and Affiliations

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Alignment with [Metro South Health Research Strategy 2019 - 2024](#)

- Build research capability
- Increase research capacity
- Embed research in clinical services
- Translate research to better health
- Research excellence

Alignment with [Allied Health Research Capability & Development Strategy 2017 - 2020](#)

- Engage staff as research consumers
- Enable staff as research generators
- Build research-enabling infrastructure and strategic processes
- Strengthen leadership in research and innovation
- Enhance internal research collaboration and synergy
- Strengthen partnerships with consumers and external stakeholders

Alignment with [Allied Health Research Capability & Development Strategy 2017 - 2020](#)

- Standard 1 – Clinical Governance
- Standard 2 – Partnering with consumers
- Standard 3 – Preventing and controlling healthcare-associated infection
- Standard 4 – Medication safety
- Standard 5 – Comprehensive care
- Standard 6 – Communicating for safety
- Standard 7 – Blood management
- Standard 8 – Recognising and responding to acute deterioration

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Practice Issue

Accurate and timely speech pathology assessment of dysphagia (swallowing difficulties) is essential to minimise patient risk, improve quality of life and limit length of hospital stay. Unfortunately access to dysphagia care can be limited for some patients living in rural and remote areas due to geographical distances and lack of available services. Recent health impacts of conditions such as COVID have also highlighted the challenges for patients and clinicians to deliver usual in-person services for aerosol generating procedures such as swallowing assessments. In these circumstances telepractice services that enable safe and reliable synchronous (real-time) clinical swallowing assessments are necessary. Studies published in the past decade, led by Professor Ward, have demonstrated that dysphagia assessments via telepractice are valid and reliable. However, evidence of the benefits of this service model within a large-scale service implementation was needed.

Evidence

A new telepractice model of care was implemented across five hub-spoke sites (encompassing 18 Queensland Health facilities). Data about usual service delivery (including the frequency and mode of service) was collected prior to study commencement. Once the telepractice model of care was implemented, data was collected from the first 50 sessions completed across all services. Collected data included: patient demographics, referral reason, days from referral to assessment, estimation of days from referral to service if using standard model of care, and the number/duration/outcome of telepractice appointments. Patients and the telepractice clinician also completed a satisfaction questionnaire after each appointment.

Study results identified that the telepractice model of care resulted in an average 2-day reduction from referral to time of assessment ($p = 0.002$). Mean cost savings from the telepractice model of care ranged from \$85 - \$981 (average of \$218). High levels of satisfaction were reported by both patients and clinicians.

Practice Change

This study demonstrated successful implementation of a new service model across multiple Queensland Health sites, resulting in improved service efficiencies. Outcomes have resulted in increased delivery of clinical swallowing assessments via telepractice across Queensland Health, ultimately reducing service cost and patient wait times.

Publication/s

Burns, C. L., Ward, E. C., Gray, A., Baker, L., Cowie, B., Winter, N., Rusch, R., Saxon, R., Barnes, S., & Turvey, J. (2019). Implementation of speech pathology telepractice services for clinical swallowing assessment: An evaluation of service outcomes, costs and consumer satisfaction. *Journal of Telemedicine and Telecare*, 25(9), 545–551. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1357633X19873248>

Adapted from Tilley Pain (Townsville HHS)

Based on the Australian Healthcare and Hospitals Association's Health Policy Evidence Brief

Metro South Health Research Strategy 2019 – 2024 https://qheps.health.qld.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0012/2325000/research-strategy.pdf

Allied Health Research Capability & Development Strategy 2017 – 2020 <https://metrosouth.health.qld.gov.au/sites/default/files/allied-health-research-strategy.pdf>

National Safety and Quality Health Service Standards <https://www.safetyandquality.gov.au/sites/default/files/migrated/Overview-of-the-NSQHS-Standards-second-edition.pdf>