WHAT'S IN YOUR HNC DYSPHAGIA TOOLBOX? A REVIEW OF OPTIONS AND EVIDENCE

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Learning Objectives:

- Identify evidence-based therapeutic exercises and modalities applicable to dysphagia management in individuals treated for head and neck cancer.
- Analyze the rationale, benefits, and limitations of adjunctive interventions such as NMES, MFR, and RMST within a multi-modal treatment framework.
- Design an individualized, data-driven dysphagia rehabilitation plan that integrates preventive, restorative, and compensatory strategies for HNC survivors.

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Head and neck cancer (HNC) survivors frequently experience chronic dysphagia and related functional impairments secondary to surgery, radiation, and chemotherapy. As cancer survival rates improve, speech-language pathologists (SLPs) are increasingly called upon to manage the complex sequelae of oncologic treatment. This presentation provides a concise, evidence-informed overview of therapeutic tools, modalities, and intervention strategies designed to optimize swallowing and communication outcomes for this population. Participants will explore preventive and rehabilitative exercise programs (e.g., Pharyngocise, “Eat and Exercise,” PRO-ACTIVE trial protocols), strategies for managing radiation-associated fibrosis and trismus, and principles of Complete Decongestive Therapy for head and neck lymphedema. A range of adjunct modalities, including neuromuscular electrical stimulation (NMES), myofascial release (MFR), surface electromyography (sEMG), fiberoptic endoscopic evaluation of swallowing (FEES) biofeedback, and respiratory muscle strength training (RMST), will be reviewed with emphasis on their theoretical rationale, supporting evidence, and clinical indications. Discussion will highlight how to individualize treatment selection using objective measures (e.g., IOPI, OM-MIP, MEP/MIP) and patient-reported outcomes, while maintaining safety and feasibility across care settings. Attendees will leave equipped with practical, data-driven strategies to enhance their HNC Dysphagia Toolbox and to advocate for comprehensive, interdisciplinary rehabilitation of this unique patient population.

Speaker's Bio: Kelly Salmon SLPD, CCC-SLP, BCS-S, CLT-LANA, NDC is a speech-language pathologist specializing in treating adults with communication and swallowing disorders across the continuum of care. She has been a Board-Certified Specialist in Swallowing and Swallowing Disorders (BCS-S) since 2011 and earned the designation of a Lymphology Association of North America Certified Lymphedema Therapist (CLT-LANA) in 2014, specializing in the treatment of head and neck lymphedema. Kelly has focused on becoming an expert in treating swallowing disorders resulting from many medical conditions. Modalities and device-driven treatments for dysphagia and oncology rehabilitation have become focused areas of clinical practice for Kelly over the years. Kelly takes pride in her teaching and supervision of students, presenting at national conferences, and engaging in multidisciplinary research initiatives. She is an Associate Professor of Speech-Language Pathology at Drexel University, Elkins Park Campus, Pennsylvania.