

Celebrating Swallow Aware campaign partnership

The Public Health Agency (PHA), Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists (RCSLT) and Hospitality Ulster welcomed Nick Hewer, President of RCSLT, to Brain Injury Matters to celebrate with all those who contributed to the resources designed for the recent Swallow Aware campaign.

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6 minutes



The Public Health Agency (PHA), Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists (RCSLT) and Hospitality Ulster welcomed Nick Hewer, President of RCSLT, to Brain Injury Matters to celebrate with all those who contributed to the resources designed for the recent Swallow Aware campaign.

The campaign aims to improve the lives of people with dysphagia – the medical term for eating, drinking and swallowing difficulties* – enabling them to not only eat out but to connect, interact and to enhance their mental wellbeing.

The PHA and Hospitality Ulster worked in partnership with people living with dysphagia, the community and voluntary sector, and the local Health and Social Care Trusts to enhance the food and drink industry's understanding of challenges people living with dysphagia face. To support this, a factsheet and wallet card was developed to outline not only the difficulties, but to provide tips and ideas on how to help overcome these.

Nick Hewer, the former TV presenter of Countdown and star of The Apprentice, met with some of the key partners and heard from those living with dysphagia about their contribution to the Swallow Aware campaign resources and the difference this has made.

Aidan Dawson, Chief Executive at the PHA, said: "The collaboration between all the partners to design and launch both resources for the Swallow Aware campaign has been commendable. In particular, I would like to pay tribute to the people who live with dysphagia who provided crucial advice on the content and design of the resources – their experience and input was invaluable to the campaign's development.

"The resources will help highlight the challenges and practical solutions which can improve someone's hospitality experience. Importantly, it helps to keep people safe whilst eating out and gives them the confidence to enjoy those important social experiences."

Ruth Sedgewick, Head of Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists Northern Ireland, said: "People who live with dysphagia are at higher risk of food or drink going into their airways. This can lead to excessive coughing and can even lead to choking. They often have to think about how they will be able to eat or drink at important family and social events and because of the issues they experience sometimes they avoid them entirely.

"The hospitality sector can play a vital role in helping to improve the quality of life for people living with dysphagia by providing a good quality experience for them and their families. The factsheet and wallet card help to alleviate some of the anxiety people living with dysphagia experience when eating and drinking outside their homes, which subsequently helps improve their quality of life and reduce the potential of social isolation that can lead to poorer health outcomes.

"We are delighted to have Nick Hewer here today at Brain Injury Matters to recognise the hard work that went into the campaign from all the partners."

Joel Neill, Operations Director at Hospitality Ulster, said: “We were proud to be involved in the development of this important factsheet which provides useful advice for businesses in the hospitality sector to help support people with eating, drinking and swallowing difficulties.

“Our members value all customers and if we are able to support people with dysphagia and their families to have more choice in their social life and feel confident when visiting various hospitality outlets, then it’s a win all round for the businesses and their customers.”

Brain Injury Matters supports, empowers and advocates for people affected by acquired brain injury, with dysphagia being one of the many unseen challenges. Leah Bachelor, a Brain Injury Matters service user, said: “I suffered a ruptured brain aneurysm and was left unable to move anything apart from my eyes. I’m a young professional businesswoman, I drive my own vehicle and use a powered wheelchair, yet continually face challenges when using the hospitality sector. I am pleased to see the hospitality factsheet launched and that awareness is being raised within the sector about dysphagia. It will help people like me to be more confident when going out to socialise and to have a greater choice of places to go to eat and drink with friends and family.”

The user-friendly factsheet for the hospitality sector has ten top tips to help improve the experience of people living with dysphagia when they socialise.

The wallet has a QR code which links directly to the hospitality factsheet. When shown to hospitality staff they are able to quickly read through the ten top tips to support the customer.

The swallow aware factsheet for hospitality is available at www.pha.site/HospitalityFactsheet

For further information about dysphagia visit www.pha.site/Dysphagia

Notes to the editor

Photo caption - ‘Getting everyone around the table: Swallow Awareness in the Hospitality Industry’ with Nick Hewer, best known from BBC TV’s The Apprentice, is UK President of the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists (RCSLT).

- *Dysphagia is the medical term for eating, drinking and swallowing difficulties and it can affect people at any stage of their lives. It can often occur alongside a range of medical conditions, including, dementia, cancer, stroke, some mental health

conditions, Parkinson's disease and learning disabilities.

- Help and support is available to help people to live well with a swallowing difficulty. Contact a health care professional, such as your GP or a Speech and Language Therapy Service to get support
- The swallow aware wallet card can be obtained by the service user following a speech and language swallow assessment from a Speech and Language Therapist
- A wallet card can also be obtained by emailing the Public Health Agency at dysphagiani@hscni.net
- Dysphagia is the medical term for swallowing difficulties, which can affect anyone at any stage of their life. The condition can range from some people with dysphagia having problems swallowing certain foods or liquids, while others can't swallow at all
- Research has shown that 16-23% of the population have difficulties eating, drinking or swallowing, rising to 27% in those over 76 years of age.

For more information and research visit Royal College of Speech and Language Therapist's website www.rcslt.org

- Within the population, issues with eating drinking and swallowing can occur in:
 - Up to 100% of people with motor neurone disease
 - Up to 90% of people in intensive care
 - 85% of people with dementia
 - 79% of people at the end of their lives
 - 55% of people with head and neck cancer
 - 50% of people with Parkinson's disease
 - 42% of people who have had a stroke
 - 31% of people with multiple sclerosis
 - 8-17% of people with a learning disability

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