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Safe Efficient and Enjoyable Mealtimes (SEEM Study): Creating a toolkit for families of children who need assistance with eating and drinking – a multi-method investigation

Background

People with dysphagia who require mealtime assistance are at greater risk of emergency hospitalisation and other negative outcomes. However, the abilities and experiences of family-carers providing mealtime assistance to children are unknown. This multi-method PhD investigation will create a toolkit to support family-carers and Speech & Language Therapists (SLT) when developing mealtime recommendations, including the change(s) targeted (texture, pacing) and adherence approaches.

Methods

The 'develop intervention' stage of the MRC framework for complex intervention development guided 4 studies:

Best research evidence: systematic literature review (Study A)

Clinical expertise: survey of UK SLT clinical practice (Study B)

Patient and/or carer values: qualitative family mealtime exploration (Study C)

These findings will be synthesised and a prototype toolkit produced via co-creation (Study D)

Outcomes

Study A: Prospero registration [CRD42021257596], searches and screening completed. Included studies are highly heterogeneous in both participant type (child, carer or dyad), targeted changes, location and outcomes.

Study B: Recruitment completed (May-July 2021). 102 participants progressed to final question. SLTs used multiple mealtime recommendation targets (n=27) e.g., positioning, utensils. Many frequently (n=22, >60% reporting sometimes-often). Qualitative analysis revealed two main SLT working styles, 'Consultative collaboration' or 'Informative prescription'.

Study C: NHS ethics approval anticipated with planned protocol registration and data collection (October-December 2023).

Study D: Planned (2024-25).

Discussion

Findings so far highlight the complexity of creating mealtime recommendations due to multiple potential targets and a limited research evidence base. Future and current findings will guide the toolkit creation to support this complex practice area.

