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Electrical Stimulation Therapy for Dysphagia: Descriptive Results of Two Surveys

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Abstract. Given the paucity of objective information on neuromuscular electrical stimulation approaches to dysphagia therapy, and the expanding utilization of this clinical approach, we designed and conducted two surveys to gather large-scale information regarding reported practice patterns, outcomes, complications, and professional perceptions associated with electrical stimulation approaches to dysphagia therapy. Self-administered questionnaires were mailed to 1000 randomly selected speech-language pathologists in each of two groups: (1) clinicians who had completed a formal electrical stimulation training course and were actively using these techniques, and (2) clinicians who were members of Special Interest Division 13 of the American Speech-Language and Hearing Association. Survey responses were anonymous and no incentive to respond was included. Acceptable response rates were achieved for both surveys (47% and 48%). Both groups of respondents were demographically similar and reported similar practice patterns. Stroke was the most common etiology of dysphagia treated with this approach. The majority of respondents identified no specific dysphagia criteria for application of electrical stimulation, used varied behavioral treatment methods, and did not follow patients beyond therapy. Clinicians reported positive outcomes with no treatment- related complications. Satisfaction with this approach was reported to be high among patients and professionals. Clinicians who did not report using these techniques indicated that they were waiting for more objective information on clinical outcomes and safety.

Results of these surveys form an initial description of practice patterns and outcomes associated with electrical stimulation approaches to dysphagia therapy.

Key words: Dysphagia — Electrical stimulation —Survey — Deglutition — Deglutition disorders. Transcutaneous neuromuscular electrical stimulation