

New MUSC voice and swallowing institute merges art and science

Eating an ice cream cone on a hot summer day. Singing a lullaby to a baby. Simple pleasures. Wonderful pleasures.

It's easy to take such things for granted, unless you have a voice or swallowing disorder. Simple pleasures can become labors or, worse still, impossible to enjoy.

The Medical University of South Carolina is better equipped than ever to provide help to adults and children who have voice, swallowing and/or speech problems. The newly established MUSC Evelyn Trammell Institute for Voice and Swallowing is the first in South Carolina to provide a multi-disciplinary center for the evaluation and treatment of such disorders.

Bonnie Martin-Harris, Ph.D., director of the institute, comes to MUSC from St. Joseph's Hospital of Atlanta, where she established the Evelyn Trammell Voice & Swallowing Center. Dr. Martin-Harris is an internationally known speech pathologist, scientist and teacher, who specializes in voice and swallowing.

Dr. Lucinda Halstead, M.D., is the institute's medical director. She has achieved international recognition for her work in laryngology, medical and surgical care of the voice, and pediatric and adult airway disorders.

The multidisciplinary team of the institute – comprised of speech pathologists, voice teachers and medical experts in the treatment of ear, nose and throat problems – works together to develop the most appropriate care plan for each patient. Close collaboration is maintained with pulmonologists, gastroenterologists, head and neck surgeons, pediatric and adult neurologists, audiologists and the MUSC Cochlear Implant Center.

The institute has some of the most advanced technologies available today, such as video stroboscopy, a sophisticated video technique that enables specialists to view and analyze the movement of vocal folds in simulated slow motion.

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VOICE

Vocal problems may occur when vocal folds suffer misuse or overuse. Problems may also be associated with illness, stress, trauma or surgery. Specialists at the MUSC Evelyn Trammell Institute for Voice and Swallowing are especially sensitive to the frustrations and anxieties related to voice problems, especially for those whose careers depend on their voice.

EVALUATION

Following a physician's referral, voice specialists fully evaluate vocal abilities using state-of-the-art analysis, and provide appropriate recommendations and treatment. The evaluation process is highly educational and interactive, allowing patients to view video images of their own vocal folds. This process, along with recommendations from the specialist and physician, assists patients in making decisions for care based upon their needs.

TREATMENT

Voice specialists teach proper maintenance and hygiene of the voice. When appropriate, they work closely with community vocal coaches to help patients achieve full vocal performance. Voice restoration following removal of the voice box involves pre- and post-operative management that includes electronic speech aids and prostheses.



Dr. Bonnie Martin-Harris examines a patient at the MUSC Evelyn Trammell Institute for Voice and Swallowing.



SWALLOWING

Approximately 6 million people in the United States have some form of swallowing disorder. Dysphagia, difficulty with swallowing, can occur as a result of illness, injury or disease. Swallowing problems can significantly affect the ability to receive safe and proper nutrition and hydration, resulting in muscle weakness, fatigue, irritability, difficulty fighting disease, breathing problems or pneumonia.

SYMPTOMS

Warning signs of swallowing problems:

- Frequent throat clearing or coughing while eating or drinking
- Wet or gurgly sounding voice during or after eating
- Increased congestion in the chest after eating or drinking
- Food or liquid coming from the nose while eating or drinking
- Slow eating, which can lead to weight loss
- Multiple swallows on a single mouthful
- Feeling of food sticking in the mouth, throat or upper chest
- Fatigue or shortness of breath while eating or drinking

TREATMENT

A team of professionals works together to develop a plan of care. The goal of the team is to return the patient to safe, effective swallowing, good nutrition and health.