

Dysphagia in the elderly and nutritional status

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Dysphagia is an emergent swallowing disorder in the elderly population, which is characterized by a difficulty or impairment in swallowing liquids, solids or semi-solids elements [1,2]. Age related physiologic changes and pathologies make elderly people more suitable to present dysphagia [2]. This swallowing disorder has an impact in the nutritional status, and can lead to undernutrition and/or dehydration, by reducing the food and liquid intake [3,4].

The aim of this study is to evaluate the prevalence of dysphagia in hospitalized elderly people (≥ 65 years) and the relation between dysphagia, demographic factors and nutritional status. This study took place in the Hospital de Sant Joan Despí Moisès Broggi, Barcelona (HSJDMB), where we applied a survey to 70 random patients (aged between 66-96 years, 50% females).

The presence of dysphagia was evaluated by the Volume-Viscosity Swallow Test (V-VST), and 20% of the patients presented dysphagia. We found a significant relation between older age and dysphagia.

The nutritional status was evaluated by the application of the Mini Nutritional Assessment Short Form (MNA-SF). Although the differences between the two groups were not statistically significant, we found a higher association between malnutrition (37,5%) and risk of malnutrition (50%) in patients with dysphagia, when compared with the patients without dysphagia (23,2% and 44,6%). We also found lower Body Mass Index (BMI) and higher percentage of recent weight loss (%WL) in patients with dysphagia (n.s.).

We consider dysphagia to be an underdiagnosed problem in the elderly. To prevent nutritional complications in this population, the knowledge about the diagnostic and the nutritional approach of dysphagia must be enhanced. Further studies are also needed in order to understand the determinants of dysphagia in older people.

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