Background

St Bartholomew’s Hospital (SBH) and the Royal London Hospital (RLH) provides specialist head and neck cancer treatment for those patients who reside in the north east of London. This area includes Tower Hamlets, City and Hackney, Redbridge, Newham, Waltham Forest and Barking, Havering and Dagenham.

Historically within this area, pre-treatment counselling has been delivered to head and neck cancer patients by their local Speech and Language Therapy (SLT) team. Appointments are usually offered in the outpatients department and arranged with the patient at their convenience. Arranging these appointments can be difficult due to a number of reasons: late diagnosis resulting in quick surgical interventions, difficulty for patients to find the time for an extra appointment and poor communication between professionals meaning that the local SLT is not aware of patients.

As a consequence of this, patients can miss out on pre-treatment counselling between teams. As a team we wanted to address pre-treatment counselling and therefore at risk of not fully being aware of potential speech and swallow changes.

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Evidence

NICE guidelines state that every patient undergoing head and neck cancer treatments should be offered pre-treatment counselling.

SIGN highlights that those patients that will have significant speech, swallowing or communication issues would benefit from SLT intervention at diagnosis.

Review of current practice

H&N SLT questionnaire:

- As a network it was agreed that little is known or shared about pre-treatment counselling between teams.
- A need to standardise information and improve information sharing was highlighted. Service triggers needed to be put in place.

A review of historical data:

- Documentation of pre-treatment counselling was only found when a patient had been seen at SBH.
- Local area patients did not have consistent documentation about what information they were given.

Following the network review, SLT agreed to create shared leaflets and a proforma specifically relating to surgical patients to improve information sharing across the network relating.

New proposed pathway

Changes to the pathway

In April 2012, as a new initiative to help reduce surgical patients missing pre-treatment counselling, SLT started to attend pre-operative assessment clinic (POAC).

As surgical patients must attend POAC, SLT aimed to see those patients who:
- Would need a separate pre-treatment counselling appointment in Tower Hamlets or City & Hackney.
- Local area patients who have not been able to access pre-assessment counselling prior to POAC.

Advantages:

- SLT input would be more accessible to patients during essential POAC appointments.
- Able to ensure all patients within the Tower Hamlets and City & Hackney area have been offered SLT input.
- Improved joint working as Clinical Nurse Specialists and Dietetics attend this clinic.
- Less SLT only OPA for patients within the Tower Hamlets and City & Hackney area.
- Opportunity to see local team patients if they are unable to be seen in a timely manner.

Measuring effectiveness

These changes to the surgical pre-treatment pathway will be reviewed at the beginning of April 2013. The review will look at:

- Number of patients seen in POAC which has prevented a separate PAC being made (surgery only).
- Number of patients being referred in locally with PAC information formally given to add to file.
- Patient satisfaction survey of pre-treatment counselling and outcomes.
- Team review of how the pathway changes have altered the service.
- Audit.

Summary

Benefits are already being seen with the addition of Speech and Language therapy to Pre-operative admissions clinic for pre-treatment counselling. The focus is to improve current pathways and communications between the MDT and local SLT teams to ensure patients are given the best care possible.

References

- Scottish Intercollegiate Guidelines Network, Diagnosis and management of head and neck Cancer A national clinical guideline October 2006.
- RCSLT Head and Neck Cancer.