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Kochi | Posted on Feb 29, 2012 at 10:12am IST

Amrita Institute launches Swallow Therapy



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KOCHI: People suffering from oral cancer face problems in swallowing food. It is not only difficult but painful too. Cases of oral cancer are on the rise in Kerala and about 14 per cent of Keralites are undergoing treatment for cancers related to tongue, cheek and throat. For such patients, Amrita Institute of Medical Sciences (AIMS) has launched a two-year training course in swallow therapy at the ongoing Amrita Head and Neck Supportive Care Oncology Meet 2012.

“Due to the changing ways of life and habits like chewing tobacco, the number of incidences of tongue cancer is on the rise in Kerala. There are no proper avenues for detection and management of swallowing-related problems in our country and no proper supporting care is being provided,” said Dr Subramania Iyer, Head of the Department of Head and Neck Oncology, AIMS. Dr Iyer heading the training programme.

Some nurses have already been trained to assist oral cancer patients in swallowing. Though, short-term courses were offered but they were found to be insufficient. “Even if people want to undergo training in swallow therapy there are no institutes offering structured training programmes,” he said.

A swallow therapist can help patients learn to swallow safely and effectively. Specific diets of varying thickness and consistency will be recommended to the patients. Some may have to be fed through feeding tubes and therapy would help them swallow normally in the long run, he said. Proper posture techniques and exercises to strengthen muscles are given. Swallow clinics offer all facilities such as assessment of swallowing problems, suggest treatment, provide supervision during treatment and help patients overcome swallowing-related problems. Those having BSc in speech and language therapy can apply. Only six seats are available.

“Though more hands are required, we want to ensure that each candidate undergoes proper hands-on training so that they can train others too and we can have good swallowing therapy centres associated with cancer centres,” he said. “We are collaborating with the University of California. Dr Jayakumar of KIMS who specialises in swallow therapy is part of the faculty which will also have specialists from abroad. Dr Meera Nair, speech therapist, AIMS, will be in-charge,” he added.

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