

# Fibreoptic Endoscopic Evaluation of Swallowing (FEES)

## Service model

Fibreoptic Endoscopic Evaluation of Swallowing (FEES) is an instrumental assessment tool used to evaluate swallowing function and guide the treatment of swallowing disorders (dysphagia). Instrumental assessment of dysphagia provides visualisation of many critical swallow functions, allowing dysphagia management decisions to be based on objective information relating to the swallow. Literature demonstrates that instrumental assessment of dysphagia allows objective evaluation of swallow and therefore better informs management and intervention.

FEES involves passing the nasendoscope transnasally to allow direct visualisation of the oropharynx, pharynx and larynx during swallowing. Endoscopy is traditionally performed by an Ear, Nose and Throat (ENT) medical officer to assess nasal, velopharyngeal, and laryngeal pathology to assist diagnosis, to assess function, and to guide medical and surgical treatment. The use of endoscopy by speech pathologists is for the assessment and management of oro-pharyngeal dysphagia, but not for medical diagnosis.

The development of FEES services/clinics may be under one of two distinct models, both requiring an appropriately trained speech pathologist:

1. Speech Pathology-led FEES clinics with the speech pathologist completing both the endoscopist role and leading the FEES procedure. The ENT medical officer may be consulted during/after these clinics pending specific patient needs (e.g. viewing video footage for anatomical opinion/advice).
2. Joint FEES clinic, with the ENT surgeon (or similar medical officer experienced in endoscopy) completing the endoscopist role and the speech pathologist leading and interpreting the FEES procedure.

## Key elements of role

- Patients requiring dysphagia (swallow) assessment with FEES are managed by a speech pathologist (speech pathology-led clinics) or in conjunction with a medical officer who performs the technical/endoscopy component (joint FEES Clinics)
- Speech pathologists must attain formal FEES competency in accordance with the Queensland Health Speech Pathology Fibreoptic Endoscopic Evaluation of Swallowing (FEES) Competency Program (2014) for both models
- Comprehensive assessment and identification of each patient's risk factors is performed by the speech pathologist and discussed with the referring team. Further discussion with ENT surgeon/endoscopist for advice as required.
- The speech pathologist performing the FEES assessment is required to ensure that the FEES procedure is completed in a safe and suitable environment with suitably qualified medical and nursing staff, and emergency medical equipment immediately available to manage any adverse events.

## Outcomes

- Speech pathology-led FEES clinics have been implemented at the Princess Alexandra Hospital, The Townsville Hospital and Gold Coast University Hospital. Gold Coast University Hospital report a saving of 6-7 hours per month of medical officer time as a result of utilising this model.
- Joint FEES clinics have been implemented at the Royal Brisbane & Women's Hospital, Cairns Hospital, Rockhampton Hospital and Logan hospital, with work underway at Rockhampton Hospital and Logan Hospital to implement Speech pathology-led FEES clinics.
- The Gold Coast University Hospital have reported up to 32 per cent increased use of instrumental assessment to guide dysphagia management as a result of access to a FEES clinic.
- Reduced duplication of patient attendance at both speech pathology dysphagia assessment and ENT assessment.
- Increased reliability and sustainability of FEES services at sites with speech pathology-led clinics
- Delivery of regular FEES Introductory workshops for knowledge and skills for speech pathologists, increasing the ability of speech pathologists to refer to FEES clinics and prepare for competency training at appropriate sites

## Resources to support implementation of model

[Template: Proposal to introduce a new FEES clinic or service](#)

[Template: Protocol to introduce FEES including passing and operating the nasendoscope](#)

[Speech Pathology Fibreoptic Endoscopic Evaluation of Swallowing \(FEES\) Competency Program \(2014\)](#)

## Evaluation measures

- Number of patients able to access instrumental dysphagia assessment
- Number of patients able to access FEES assessments / number of FEES procedures per year
- Documentation of adverse events related to FEES clinics
- Waiting period for urgent referrals for instrumental dysphagia assessment

## Contact details

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