The number of residents in care homes who have swallowing difficulties is increasing. In 2016 the Speech and Language Therapy Service identified that some residents were being referred who did not require direct assessment or indirect support.

The project aimed to identify how care home staff and Speech and Language Therapists could work together to achieve better outcomes for the residents, use resources more effectively and improve the equity of service across the 87 care homes in Lanarkshire.

Aims
- Address inappropriate referrals to Speech and Language Therapy from care homes.
- Improve working between care home staff and Speech and Language Therapists.
- Use resources more efficiently to provide equitable care.

Methodology
- Referral data was analysed which showed that almost 30% of referrals could have been effectively managed without Speech and Language Therapy input if care home staff were better informed and educated about swallowing difficulties.
- Qualitative information from questionnaires and interviews from care home staff identified areas for review and development including referral criteria, a reference guide, information on end of life care and training.

Outcomes
A resource folder “Swallowing Matters” was developed in consultation with care home staff in both North and South Lanarkshire. This was launched in January 2018.

Key features of the resource are:
- A flow chart to aid decision making and provide guidance as to when assistance should be requested from Speech and Language Therapy
- Practical tools and resources which can be photocopied
- An action plan to record outcomes for individual residents

Feedback from the launch of Swallowing Matters has been extremely positive.

Next Steps
- Implementation of a training plan for care home staff
- Embedding the use of Swallowing Matters
- Analysis of the impact of the training and resource pack

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