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Speech language therapy for cancer patients and new tendencies

On Labor Day, last May, the 1st Symposium of Head and Neck Speech Language Therapy took place, simultaneously to the traditional event promoted by the Department of Head and Neck Surgery of *Hospital das Clínicas*, from the School of Medicine of *Universidade de São Paulo*, known as “Big Neck”. By emphasizing evaluation protocols and therapeutic programs in speech language therapy for cancer patients, the scientific agenda counted on experts in the field in Brazil. Attendance was higher than expected, and the Symposium approached exciting themes and interesting discussions that comprehended several fields of speech language therapy involving head and neck cancer throughout the day.

The success of the IX Brazilian Head and Neck Speech Language Pathology and Audiology Congress, held during the XXIV Brazilian Congress of Head and Neck Surgery, reinforces the observation that speech language therapy for cancer patients still has room for improvement in more traditional fields, such as vocal adaptation of total laryngectomized patients. Recent studies used high-end technology to search for a more refined understanding of anatomophysiological aspects, as well as to provide a more accurate evaluation of therapeutic resources, addressed to the so-called “therapy refinement”.

Aspects that had been taken for granted by patients and professionals, such as minor complaints concerning deglutition and/or voice during the late postoperative period after thyroidectomy, have been analyzed by recent studies in Brazil. Results aiming at improving the quality of life are encouraging. Likewise, concepts of aesthetic orofacial motricity applied to individuals submitted to oncologic surgery involving the oral cavity and the oropharynx have indicated therapeutic results that demonstrate aspects ranging from the minimization of scar signals to the refinement of speech language articulation.

On the other end, we should register the tendency that was presented in Brasília, regarding the “palliative speech language pathologist”, and this field provides great interdisciplinary integration in terms of caring for patients who have no chances of cure.

Such national progress in the field of speech language therapy involving head and neck cancer is connected with the world tendency and shows that professionals and scientists are conducting serious work with scientific basis.

The respect for bioethical principles and scientific progress has been present in the Brazilian field of speech language therapy for cancer patients, which is proved by the growing number of qualified studies and publications.