The treatment of hoarseness
National guideline by AAO HNSF

The American Academy of Otolaryngology – Head and Neck Surgery Foundation (AAO-HNSF) released a document (Otolaryngology–Head and Neck Surgery (2009) 141, S1-S31) to help the management of patients with the symptom of hoarseness. The guideline highlights 11 aspects analyzed under the evidence-based perspective. A multidisciplinary panel with 24 specialists (neurology, speech-language pathology, professional voice teaching, family medicine, pulmonology, geriatric medicine, nursing, internal medicine, otolaryngology – head and neck surgery, pediatric medicine, and consumers), including two speech-language pathologists - Joseph C. Stemple and Edie R. Hapner took part in this unique initiative. The document states clearly that the word hoarseness is related to a symptom of deviated voice and dysphonia to its diagnosis.

The recommendations were classified as: strong recommendation (clinicians should follow the guide), recommendation (clinicians generally follow) and optional (flexibility in the decision making process). The outline of the guideline action statements presents data about 5 aspects: diagnosis, medical therapy, voice therapy, invasive therapy and prevention.

Some of the matters discussed involved that hoarseness usually reflects a benign condition, but clinicians should consider the possibility of a serious cause; laryngoscopy has to be performed in case of persistent hoarseness or uncertain cause; imaging studies should not be made prior to laryngoscopy; anti-reflux drugs should not be generally prescribed for treating hoarseness; steroids or antibiotics should not be used routinely; clinicians should advocate voice therapy (strong recommendation – grade A evidence quality); surgery may only be carefully indicated for certain conditions (cancer, other tumors or growths, abnormal movement of the vocal folds, or abnormal tone of the vocal folds muscles); and finally, preventive procedures may decrease risk factors that cause hoarseness.

The guideline aims to deliver the best patient care regarding the symptom of dysphonia. The IALP congratulates the AAO-HNSF for this important enterprise.

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