

But I don't want a feeding tube: Ethical decisions about eating as an aspirator

Presenters:

Katherine Hutcheson, PhD, SLP (MDA)
Jennifer Hanners, Gutierrez, SLP (Texas Tech)
Peter Belafsky, MD (UC Davis)
Susan McCammon, MD (UAB)
Lisa Evangelista, PhD, SLP (UC Davis)

Instruction Level: Intermediate, Professional area

Course Structure:

This course is offered in live, virtual (online) format.

Course Date/Time:

Wednesday, Aug 28, 2026 at 11:30 CT 11:30am – 1:00pm CST

Course Description:

This course will focus on the “eating aspirator”. Physician and speech pathology faculty will present a framework for considering the continuum of management options that allow varying degrees of continued oral intake (eating) in the setting of chronic aspiration after head and neck cancer. Behavioral, procedural, and medical options will be organized from “aspiration light” to “aspiration free”. A medical ethicist will explore the ethical tension between patient autonomy (right to choose) and non-maleficence (medical duty to do no harm). Presenters will focus on practical tools and frameworks to help clinicians organize questions and document their considerations for complex decision making in this clinical population.

Learner Outcomes:

Participants will be able to:

1. Describe ‘aspiration light’ and ‘aspiration free’ solutions to continued oral intake in the setting of chronic aspiration in head and neck cancer survivors
2. Use various conversation guides and interview tools to elicit patient goals and values for shared decision making
3. Describe an ethical framework for decisions about feeding tube placement in the setting of chronic aspiration after head and neck cancer.

Time-Ordered Agenda

11:30 am – ***Introduction***

11:35 am – **The eating aspirator: Aspiration Light to Aspiration Free**

Kate Hutcheson, PhD

11:50 am – **Building mutual goals: Compassionate questions to ask (and how to document patient choice!)** - Jennifer Hanners Gutierrez, MD

12:05 pm – **To PEG or not to PEG: the top 5 questions I ask** - Peter Belafsky, MD

12:20 pm – **Ethics of the eating aspirator: Autonomy v Non-maleficence** – Susan McCammon, MD

12:35 pm 1:00 pm – ***Moderated Panel All Faculty*** - Kate Hutcheson, PhD, SLP

Completion Requirements:

In order to receive ASHA CEUs, you must complete the following—

- Watch the webinar in full
- Complete a post-course evaluation and survey upon completion

The post course evaluation will be a self-assessment of learned knowledge.

No partial credit will be given for this course.

Course Disclosures:

Content: N/A

Financial/In-kind support: ATOS Medical – unrestricted education grant



University of Texas MD
Anderson Cancer Center

This course is offered for 0.15 ASHA CEUs

Bios/Disclosures:**Dr. Kate Hutcheson**

Dr. Kate Hutcheson is a tenured Professor and Deputy Director of Clinical Research in the Department of Head and Neck Surgery with dual appointment in the Division of Radiation Oncology at the University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center. She serves as Section Chief and Research Director for the Section of Speech Pathology and Audiology. Dr. Hutcheson is a certified speech-language pathologist practicing in oncology for 20 years, a Board Certified Specialist in Swallowing and Swallowing Disorders (BCS-S), and holds a Doctorate Degree in Epidemiology. She leads an internationally recognized, extramurally funded clinical research program. She has authored over 175 journal articles with funding support from the National Institutes of Health, Patient Centered Outcomes Research Institute, the MD Anderson Institutional Research Grant Award program, and the CPRIT UT Health Innovation Training Program. She is an Associated Editor for the Head and Neck and Dysphagia journals. She is a passionate clinician and educator who lectures nationally and internationally on radiation associated dysphagia and head and neck cancer rehabilitation.

Disclosures:

Dr. Hutcheson receives research funding from the National Institutes of Health/National Cancer Institute (R01CA271223, R01CA273984), Patient Centered Outcomes Research Institute (PCORI 1609-36195), the MD Anderson Institutional Research Grant Program, and Atos Medical. Unrestricted Educational Grant outside this Program from Atos Medical. Developer and PI of the DIGEST method. Dr. Hutcheson receives no royalties or personal fees related to this DIGEST content.

Jennifer Hanners Gutierrez, Ph.D., CCC-SLP

Dr. Hanners Gutierrez is a medical speech-language pathologist (SLP) and faculty for the Department of Otolaryngology at the Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center (TTUHSC). Hanners Gutierrez graduated with her Ph.D. in 2019 after supervising acute care speech pathology at UMC Health System in Lubbock Texas, USA for over 20 years. Hanners Gutierrez treats patients of all ages and with a variety of diagnoses, specializing in dysphagia management amid critical- and terminal-illness. Hanners Gutierrez achieved two patents for medical devices sold internationally. Hanners Gutierrez was hand-picked as a Global Ambassador for TTUHSC. She traveled to northern India for as faculty for a Tropical Infectious Disease course (2018-2020) to teach on dysphagia intervention, tracheostomy management, and cleft palate. Gutierrez was given privileges to treat patients in the medical wards, and she trained physicians on best practices in dysphagia on the King George's Medical University campus. In 2016, Hanners Gutierrez was the keynote speaker for the Nutrition in Palliative Care Conference held in China (Hong Kong). Hanners Gutierrez was then asked to lead a training seminar on Palliative Medicine for a SLP sent to the USA from China in 2019. Hanners Gutierrez was a featured speaker at an aging conference in Austria in 2025. She will be a keynote and featured speaker in Spain and Austria this year at medical conferences. Hanners Gutierrez will also be the featured speaker for an upcoming 4-hour virtual conference at the Barrow Neurological Institute titled: "Dysphagia & Life-Limiting Illness: Nutritional and Ethical Decisions. Hanners Gutierrez has been inducted into the TTUHSC Hall of Fame. Hanners Gutierrez conducts research on dysphagia amid serious illness, comparing patient outcomes based on feeding route (oral vs tube) and exploring the impact of covariates, like oral health. She published novel and impactful work in 2024 and 2025.

Disclosures:

Dr. Hanners Gutierrez is employed by Employee of UMC Health System in Lubbock, Texas Employee of the Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center School of Medicine (clinical appointment). She is the Inventor of the Bionix, Inc. SafeStraw and receives royalties and is the Manager of the global education endeavor, The Storyteller & the World, Inc.

Peter Belafsky, MD (UC Davis)

Dr. Belafsky primary clinical interests are the comprehensive diagnosis and management of voice, swallowing, and airway disorders. As Director of the Voice and Swallowing Center at UC Davis, Dr. Belafsky treats a wide array of laryngeal and esophageal disorders. These disorders include but are not limited to vocal fold paralysis and paresis, vocal fold dysfunction (VCD), laryngopharyngeal reflux (LPR), chronic cough, and dysphagia caused by stroke, ALS, Zenker's diverticulum, esophageal motility disorders, Parkinson's disease, and swallowing problems suffered as a consequence of the treatment of head and neck cancer. Dr. Belafsky has pioneered minimally invasive treatments of voice and swallowing disorders. Minimally invasive in-office procedures performed by Dr. Belafsky at the Center include unsedated treatment of laryngeal polyps, leukoplakia, and papillomas, subglottic, tracheal, and esophageal strictures, and office-based vocal fold medialization.

Disclosures:

Dr. Belafsky receives research support from CA Institute for Regen Medicine. He is the cofounder of Hope Medical and Reflux Gourmet. He has no non-financial disclosures.

Susan McCammon, MD (UAB)

Dr. McCammon earned her medical degree at University of Alabama School of Medicine and completed her postdoctoral training at Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center and University of Alabama at Birmingham (UAB). Board-certified by the American Board of Otolaryngology and the American Board of Internal Medicine, Hospice & Palliative care, Dr. McCammon's areas of interest are head and neck surgical oncology and surgical palliative care. Dr. McCammon serves as Professor at UAB – School of Medicine.

Disclosures:

Dr. McCammon receives a salary from the University of Alabama.

Dr. Lisa Evangelista CScD, CCC-SLP, BCS-S

Dr. Evangelista is an Associate Professor and Director of Speech Pathology at the UC Davis Medical Center, Department of Otolaryngology-Head and Neck Surgery and is actively involved in clinical practice, academic research and educational training. She is a board-certified specialist in swallowing and swallowing disorders and serves as the chair for Head and Neck Cancer Issues for the American Speech-Language and Hearing Association convention and Executive Board of Directors for the American Board of Swallowing and Swallowing Disorders. She provides comprehensive diagnostics and contemporary management of swallowing dysfunction following surgical interventions and radiation therapy for head and neck cancers.

Disclosures:

Dr. Evangelista receives a salary from University of California, Davis Medical Center. She has no other disclosures.

Dr. Holly McMillan MCD, CCC-SLP, LMP, CLT

Dr. Holly McMillan MCD, CCC-SLP, LMP, CLT is a Senior Research Speech Language Pathologist and Co-Director of Trismus Clinic at the University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center. She is a licensed massage therapist and certified lymphedema therapist with expertise in oncology and head and neck cancer rehabilitation. Ms. McMillan leads the manual therapy service lines within the head and neck surgery department and specializes in fibrosis and lymphedema management. She is a co-investigator and collaborator on several active NIH-funded clinical trials in head and neck cancer survivorship.

Disclosures:

Dr. McMillan receives a salary from UT MD Anderson Cancer Center. She has no other disclosures.