



Speech Pathology in Cancer Survivorship – Surprises and lessons

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Background

In 2016, Castlemaine Health received government funding to establish a cancer survivorship service.

Some existing staff in the Community Rehabilitation Centre were upskilled to form the new Cancer Survivorship and Rehabilitation Team.

Initially, the Speech-Language Pathologist (SLP) was not a core member of the team. However, this changed as more clients than expected reported difficulties with deglutition and/or communication.

20% of all clients in the Cancer Survivorship and Rehabilitation Service were referred to SLP.

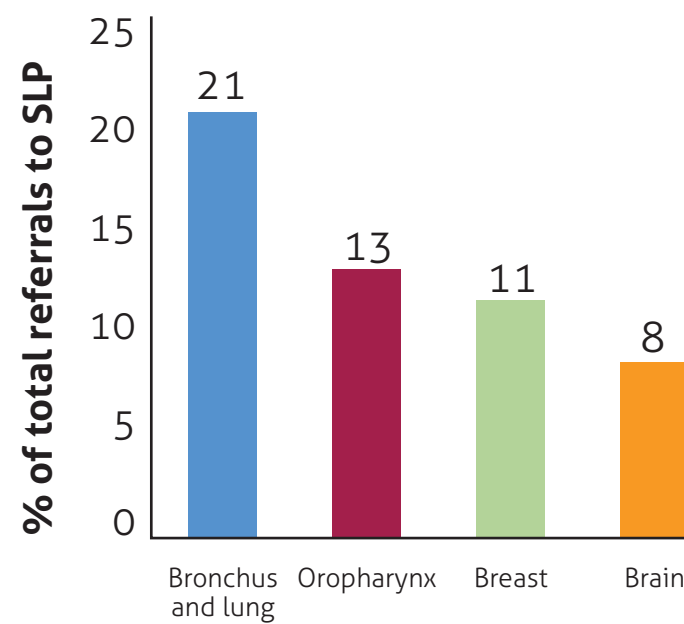
Examples of client goals

- Improve breath support and singing
- Drink a beer
- Lift the cloud and feel sharp again
- Reduce coughing
- Develop strategies to help my thinking, memory and word finding
- Eat an apple strudel from my local café

Surprises and lessons

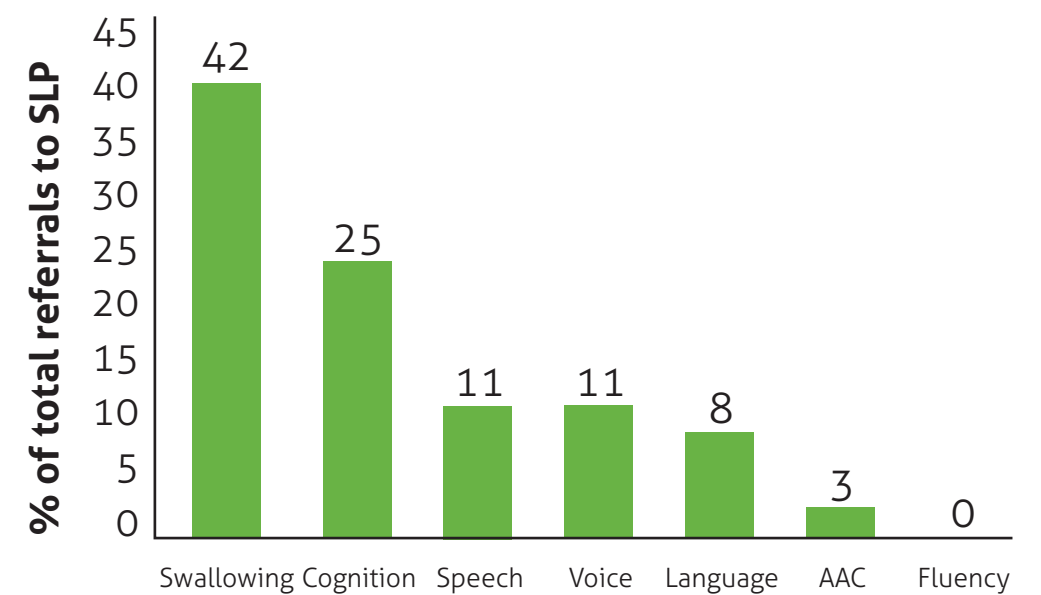
- More clients referred to SLP than anticipated
- Higher than expected number of clients with head and neck cancer referred to the cancer rehabilitation service
- Most clients referred to SLP had tumour types other than head and neck (e.g. lung, breast, bowel)
- Cancer and its treatment can have effects far beyond the affected organs (e.g. anterolateral thigh flap for oral reconstruction making using a tractor difficult)
- The use of an initial comprehensive Interdisciplinary Assessment helps to identify clients who may benefit from SLP assessment

TUMOUR TYPES MOST FREQUENTLY REFERRED TO SLP



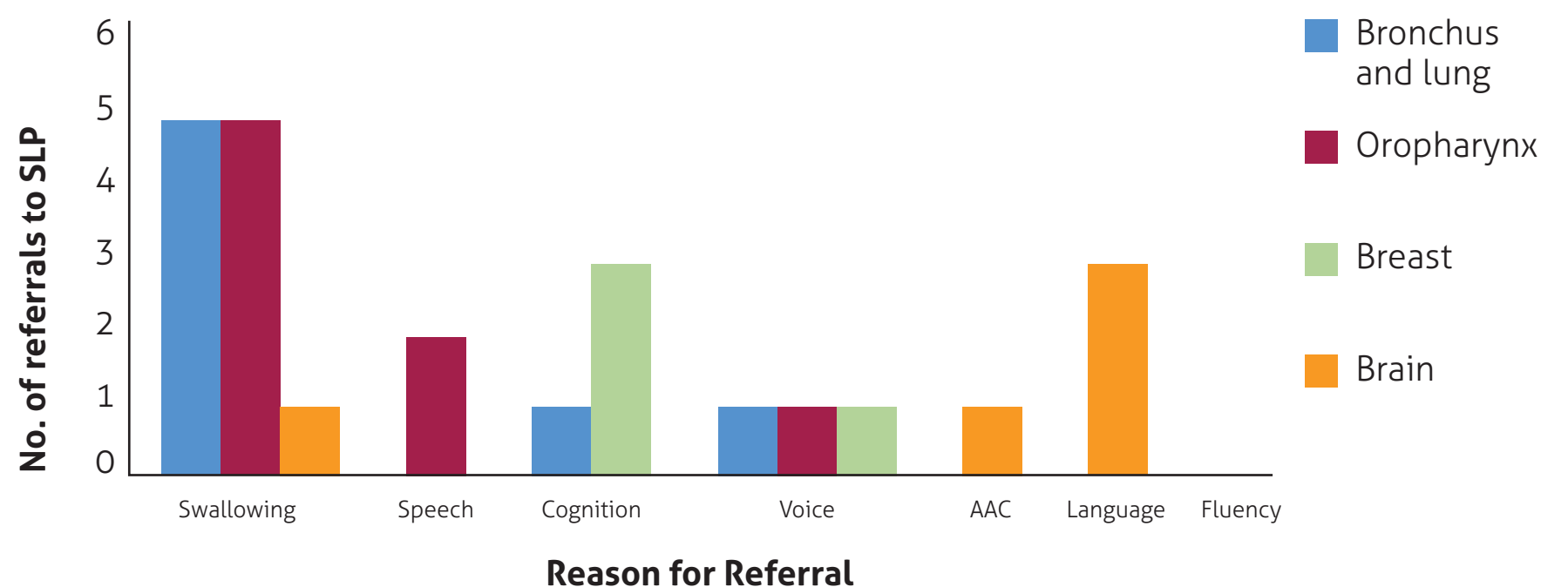
Tumour Type

REASONS FOR REFERRAL TO SLP



Range of Practice

REASON FOR REFERRAL TO SLP BY TUMOUR TYPE



Reason for Referral

Case Studies

MAN IN HIS 50s.

Lung cancer
Radiotherapy
Coughing when drinking
Referred for swallowing assessment

1 SLP appointment
Voice quality suggested vocal fold paralysis (possibly due to recurrent laryngeal nerve damage)
Letter to General Practitioner suggesting ENT referral

Diagnosis accurate
Received vocal fold augmentation
Voice and swallow returned to normal.

WOMAN IN HER 60s.

Breast cancer
Multiple rib fractures after cancer treatment
Reported difficulty singing

5 SLP appointments
Focused on breath support/control, voice quality, and vocal endurance

Singing with local musicians and enjoying it