Dysfunctional Breathing: Characteristics and Outcomes of Children and Young People Attending a Secondary Care Respiratory Clinic

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Aims To evaluate the presentation, characteristics and outcomes of children and young people diagnosed with dysfunctional breathing (DB) seen in a secondary care respiratory clinic and referred for specialist speech and language therapy (SALT).

Methods.

We identified 18 patients between 2015-18 referred to SALT with DB and analysed their health records.

Results

Age range 11-16 years (median 14 years); 14 female 4 male. Many had co-morbidities: 16 had asthma, 2 tracheo-oesophageal fistula and oesophageal atresia repair, 1 chronic regional pain syndrome, and 1 Chronic fatigue syndrome. DB was exercise induced laryngeal obstruction in 15 patients, hyperventilation syndrome 8, psychogenic cough 3, dysphonia 1.

Emergency calls and paramedic or A+E attendance in 14 patients with 1 needing intubation and ventilation. All patients had history of significant school absence.

Significant delays in diagnosing DB were noted range 1-24 months (median 6 months). Inducers of symptoms were exercise in 16 patients; swimming 3; competitive sport 8; physical education 6; bullying 3 (school and coaches); anxiety 14; emotions and stress 11 (death of family member); weather 3; posture 1 (yoga position); and odours 3.

All patients had a consultation with SALT with follow up either face to face or via a telephone consultation. 2 patients had complete resolution (after one consultation); 14 had good control; 2 no improvement; 1 lost to follow up. 10 patients were referred for clinical psychology.

SALT assessed DB: 1) type, frequency severity and duration 2) triggers 3) psychosocial concerns 4) anxiety patterns and 5) motivation for change.

A personalised treatment plan using a cognitive behavioural therapy framework was then instituted including explanation of DB and breathing control techniques.

Conclusion

DB can severely affect quality of life but early recognition and appropriate treatment with SALT will in the majority give rapid positive results.