

## NEW THICKENING AGENT BRINGS RELIEF TO INDIVIDUALS WITH SWALLOWING DISORDERS

Medical West Healthcare Center in St. Louis, Mo., is a retail medical facility with a respected reputation for addressing a patient's most personal healthcare needs. Every medical product or healthcare aid comes with professional assistance and helpful information. Staff professionals include a wide variety of medical specialists, and each patient receives individualized attention that adjusts to changing health needs. Medical West serves people who are capable of living independently, but seek healthcare guidance and advice.

Debbie Dalin Guyer, M.A., CCC-SLP, has worked for seven years as Director of Rehabilitation for Medical West, after spending 20 years in a hospital setting. Her vast experience enables her to have great insight into the complex conditions of her patients, and they rely on her for counseling and practical advice in dealing with their medical conditions.

Such was the case recently when one of Guyer's patients who suffers from Parkinson's Disease continually developed lung infections. Pulmonary specialists determined that the infections were caused by bacteria growing in Carl Huckle's lungs as a result of aspiration problems. Doctors repeatedly treated the infections but Carl, who is 78 years old, and Judith, his wife, turned to Guyer for advice on how to possibly avoid future occurrences.

Guyer, a licensed and certified speech-language pathologist, knew what to recommend. "The patient had difficulty swallowing because of his Parkinson's Disease. His avoidance of liquids led to accelerated growth of bacteria in his oral cavity (mouth) which then traveled via the "bad" saliva into his lungs, and produced bacterial infections." Carl was drinking no fluids whatsoever. Guyer explained to Carl and Judith that it was imperative that Carl increase his oral intake of fluids to maintain a healthy balance and to flush out the thick strands of mucus that interfered with swallowing and speaking.

Guyer recommended that Carl begin drinking beverages with a new thickening agent called SimplyThick™ that Medical West had begun offering to its patients. "I have had many patients who resist complying with recommendations for powdered thickeners because they are lumpy and continue to thicken, but SimplyThick is different than anything else on the market because it is not a powder. My patients are responding very positively to SimplyThick and I thought that it would be very helpful in treating Carl's aspiration problems."

"Carl had tried thickeners before but had found them unpalatable because of lumps but Debbie assured us that SimplyThick was different," said Judith. On a Friday, Guyer instructed Carl to thicken his water and iced-tea with SimplyThick to nectar consistency, and by Monday, there were significant results. Carl had gone from taking no fluids, to drinking two quarts of water a day!

"We are so pleased," says Judith. "Carl had been on and off antibiotics for more than a year, trying to clear these infections. Since he began using SimplyThick, his lungs have remained clear and infection-free." In addition, the fiber provided by SimplyThick seemed to alleviate problems Carl was experiencing with constipation, a side effect of his Parkinson's Disease medications.

SimplyThick is becoming a popular product among people like Carl who suffer from dysphagia, or difficulty swallowing. Approximately 7 to 10 percent of adults older than 50 years have dysphagia.\* Many of these people are in hospitals or skilled care facilities, but many others live independently and want to enjoy normal activities. Following complicated healthcare directives can be an ordeal.



“From the onset, we had one goal in mind as we developed SimplyThick,” says Joe Fiala, vice president of Phagia-Gel Technologies, the company that produces SimplyThick. “We wanted to create a thickener that would look and taste as close to the unthickened beverage as possible. We knew there were polymers that could solve many of the common problems associated with the other thickeners. The problem was that they are very difficult to dissolve in a home or healthcare setting. It took some trial and error, but we finally decided to pre-dissolve the thickener into a gel concentrate.”

Simple and effective preparation is something that SimplyThick’s developers knew would also be important to both healthcare professionals and individuals like Carl and his wife. “SimplyThick is sold in pre-measured individual-serving packets,” continues Fiala. “The combination of the gel formulation and the pre-measured packets is intended to ensure consistent beverage preparation day to day and from server to server. It is a simplified process, with no measuring spoons or special containers necessary.”

By having pre-measured packets, SimplyThick eliminates the guesswork and uncertainty in measuring powder thickeners. “When we approached this market, the instructions for thickening beverages with powders varied both with beverage thickness and by type of beverage,” notes Fiala. “It was extremely difficult for individuals to ensure that they were getting the right amount of thickener for the beverage they were preparing. With SimplyThick, the individual need only measure four ounces of beverage then add the diet-appropriate packet – either nectar or honey – to thicken it.” Pudding consistency can be achieved by using two honey packets.

One difficulty with powder thickeners is that they do not completely dissolve quickly. Once mixing is finished, the beverage is not ready to consume. It must stand for a few minutes to thicken. This commonly leads to over-thickening when impatient staff or caregivers add more thickener to hasten the process. “SimplyThick’s gel formulation is completely dispersed into the beverage and is ready to drink as soon as mixing is finished – literally a beverage can be consumed within 10 seconds of starting preparation,” notes Guyer.

SimplyThick was also developed to bring added enjoyment to those who suffer with swallowing problems. It thickens all liquids – hot and cold – including water, juice, soda, milk, coffee, tea, soups, purees, beer, wine and mixed drinks, while most other thickeners work with only a limited number of liquids.

Another benefit of the thickener in SimplyThick is that it is freeze-thaw stable. Water thickened with SimplyThick can be frozen and it will melt back into water at the diet-appropriate consistency. “The ability to freeze SimplyThick allows the patient to have pitchers of thickened water with thickened ice cubes at bedside without worry about beverage consistency changes over the course of the day,” notes Guyer.

“We know that it is difficult for patients with swallowing disorders to give up many of the pleasures they have enjoyed their entire lives,” says Fiala. “SimplyThick allows a patient the satisfaction of drinking a soda or cup of coffee, if his/her diet allows, or enjoying iced beverages, and that makes for a happier patient with an improved quality of life.”

Priced in between powders and pre-thickened products, SimplyThick, in the long run, provides great cost advantages when ease of use, patient preference and compliance issues are considered. Treating an incident of pneumonia or dehydration, which can be a result of non-compliance, can cost more than \$9000.\*\*

“SimplyThick has made a great difference in our lives,” says Judith. “I mix a gallon of water at a time with SimplyThick, and when we go out, I bring a bottle of this thickened water with us. I also bring packets of SimplyThick in my purse, so that when we go to restaurants, I can mix it into a beverage for Carl. It is very convenient because it mixes so quickly and easily.” Luckily for people like Carl and Judith who have discovered SimplyThick, their lives are healthier, a lot less complicated and more enjoyable.

This is exactly what Guyer and her colleagues at Medical West hope to accomplish for all of their clients. “SimplyThick is a real breakthrough in the field of thickeners because it mixes so well. People who avoided thickened beverages because their drinks looked cloudy and tasted funny say that SimplyThick doesn’t affect the taste and is much more appealing. The word is spreading because patients are responding so positively to the product. It is a very positive step in our treatment of dysphagia and the problems associated with this condition.”

\* According to American Family Physician, the official clinical journal of the American Academy of Family Physicians

\*\* According to data from the Archives of Internal Medicine and Journal of American Medical Association, updated to current dollars by Medical Care Consumer Price Index data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics

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