

## NEW THICKENING AGENT SIMPLYTHICK™ RECEIVES RAVE REVIEWS

### Food and Nutrition Service Directors Cite its Ease of Use, Effectiveness at Nursing Homes

The daily routine of Fianna Hills Nursing and Rehab Center in Fort Smith, Ark., is fast-paced and anything but routine. Aides and nurses juggle the demands of caring for patients with varying needs and abilities, and no two days are alike. As they go about their duties serving the needs of their patients, these caregivers regularly encounter problems because patients won't cooperate with recommended procedures. Chief among the caregivers' concerns are dietary issues. "We know how important it is for our patients to receive proper nutrition," says Janie Cumpton, Administrator of Fianna Hills. "Our nurses and aides work to do everything possible to ensure that patients comply with dietary directives."

Fianna Hills caregivers, like their counterparts at other facilities, often encounter additional obstacles from patients suffering from dysphagia, or swallowing problems. Approximately 7 to 10 percent of adults older than 50 years have dysphagia. It is especially common in healthcare and senior care facilities, where up to 25 percent of hospitalized patients and 30 to 40 percent of patients in nursing homes experience swallowing problems.\*

Many of these patients are required to receive their beverages with thickening additives. For a variety of reasons, the patients are often reluctant to drink them. A new thickening agent called SimplyThick™, however, is helping Cumpton and other caregivers overcome these non-compliance obstacles, and is receiving rave reviews about its ease of use and effectiveness.

Fianna Hills Nursing Center is one of 21 skilled nursing facilities in Arkansas and southwest Missouri operated by Rose Care Incorporated. Nancy Storms-Walsh, RD, LD, is the corporate director of food and nutritional services at Rose Care Inc. where she works with Cumpton and other administrators and dietitians to provide quality nutritional care to patients. Storms-Walsh regularly hears reports about non-compliance problems associated with dysphagia patients who have dietary directives for thickened beverages.

Since she is responsible for selecting the products used by the staff and patients, Storms-Walsh is constantly on the lookout for new products that can improve dietary non-compliance problems, and is keenly aware of the importance of thickeners. "We rely on these thickening agents to help our patients consume adequate amounts of liquids and nourishment so that they avoid dehydration, urinary tract infections and/or aspirated pneumonia. Unfortunately, our aides and nurses tell us that they often encounter problems getting the patients to drink the beverages with thickeners, because the additives don't stay properly mixed or form clumps in the beverages. Another problem that they encounter is that after they mix in the thickener, the beverages continue to thicken beyond the desired consistency."

Storms-Walsh heard about SimplyThick, a new thickening product, at the American Dietetic Association's Food and Nutrition Conference & Exhibition in the fall of 2001. Storms-Walsh learned that in a double-blind preference test performed at a major extended-care facility in St. Louis, Mo., patients overwhelmingly preferred SimplyThick to a leading existing product, because SimplyThick did not affect the taste of the beverage and was much more appealing in appearance than the other thickener. She also learned that SimplyThick, unlike all the other thickeners that are starch-based and come in powder form, is composed of xanthan gum and comes in a gel form. Its composition enables SimplyThick to be mixed thoroughly in beverages and, once stirred properly, does not continue to thicken or clump. After meeting with the SimplyThick representatives and seeing and tasting the product, Storms-Walsh was suitably impressed and immediately decided to introduce SimplyThick to the patients at the Rose Care facilities.

Cumpton was eager to have the patients at Fianna Hills try SimplyThick. "Our aides would try to mix beverages with the other thickening agent and would often encounter problems: powder clumps would form and/or, after mixing,

the beverage would continue to thicken to way beyond the desired consistency. The patients would complain that the beverage tasted bitter.”

Now, Cumpton says, the nurses can mix a batch of SimplyThick for use throughout the day and the beverage maintains its consistency. “SimplyThick is wonderful,” she says. “Our nurses love it because of the ease in using it and the patients tell us that the beverage’s taste is not affected.”

Eileen Basye, CDM, CFPP, the food and nutrition services director at Rose Care’s Red Rose Inn in Cassville, Mo., concurs with the difference Cumpton has seen. “The thickener we had been using didn’t stay mixed and would settle at the bottom of the glass. The nurses and aides had to spend additional time trying to keep the beverage properly mixed and the patients didn’t like the taste of the thickened beverage.”

Simple and effective preparation is something that SimplyThick’s founders knew would be important to healthcare professionals. “SimplyThick is sold in pre-measured individual-serving packets,” says John Holahan, president and co-founder of Phagia-Gel Technologies, the company that produces SimplyThick. “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 Holahan. “It was extremely difficult for staff members to ensure that they were getting the right amount of thickener for the beverage they were preparing. With SimplyThick, the staff 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 with two honey packets.

SimplyThick also has the capability of doing something else to add enjoyment to a patient’s life. 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.

And because SimplyThick will not change from its intended consistency and is freeze-thaw stable, you can freeze water thickened with SimplyThick. When it melts, it maintains the diet-appropriate consistency. This opens the door to having pitchers of thickened water with thickened ice cubes at bedside without worry about beverage consistency changes. Another possibility is to allow patients to chew or suck on thickened ice cubes.

“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 Holahan. “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.”

Flo Goett, food and nutrition services director at another Rose Care facility, Heritage Park Nursing Center in Rogers, Ark., mixes SimplyThick with a variety of beverages for her patients and couldn’t be happier with the results. “I love the way SimplyThick stays mixed,” she says, “and our patients like the way it looks and tastes.”

Storms-Walsh says that since SimplyThick has been introduced into the Rose Care system, she has heard positive feedback and reports of better compliance. “We are very pleased with the results of using SimplyThick. If our patients adhere to our nutritional recommendations, they will be healthier and happier.”

SimplyThick is comparable in price to the other thickening products on the market and, in the long run, provides great cost advantages when ease of use, patient preference and compliance issues are considered. Treating one incident of pneumonia or dehydration, which can be a result of non-compliance, can cost more than \$9000.\*\*

Storms-Walsh, Cumpton, and the other professionals responsible for the care of dysphagia patients at Rose Care facilities can see the difference that SimplyThick has made in their daily “routine.” Says Storms-Walsh, “SimplyThick simplifies the preparation process for our caregivers, stays consistent after preparation, and is pleasing to our patients. We face fewer daily obstacles using SimplyThick.”

\* 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