

# Look who's *Talking*

2016 Speech-Language Pathology  
University of Toronto Alumni Association Newsletter

## Class Reunion

An opportunity to reconnect with friends and exchange fond memories



U of T S-LP class of 1990 at their 25th reunion lunch with Department Chair Pascal Van Lieshout and former Chair Jean Walker

By Stefanie Haws 1T0

union last year by organizing a full two-day event. Lynn shared with us the details about her class reunion and what it meant to her and her former classmates.

The class reunion kicked off with the 2015 J. F. Walker Lecture, organized by the S-LP Alumni Association. Out-of-towners especially appreciated having a professional development element to include in their travel plans. Following the lecture, Lynn and her classmates had lunch at Hart House with Jean Walker, the S-LP Department's first Chair, and the current Chair, Pascal van Lieshout. Lynn mentioned how special it was to spend time with Jean Walker,

who was one of their much beloved professors. Joy Clubine, the President of the S-LP Alumni Association at the time, provided Lynn and her classmates with special pins to commemorate their 25th year since graduating from the department.

Following lunch, the 1990 class toured the Old Church on U of T campus, as their class was the last to graduate from this location before the department moved to 500 University Avenue. Lynn described returning to their classroom as "bringing back a million memories". She also said there were lots of laughs as they each gravitated and sat in their usual seats at the table. Some classmates then toured the current S-LP Department, which was an amazing contrast. The day was topped off with a dinner at a restaurant called Signs, where all the staff are hard of hearing. Lynn and her classmates were expertly taught to order their meals using rudimentary sign language.

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### The two-year Speech-Language Pathology (S-LP) program at the University of Toronto goes by in a flash!

#### **NOT ONLY DO YOU GAIN ALL THE KNOWLEDGE AND EXPERIENCE**

that you require to enter the work force, you meet your future colleagues and some new friends for life. After being apart for a few years, or sometimes many years, a class reunion offers you the opportunity to reconnect with friends, to reminisce and exchange fond memories, and to share experiences about life after the S-LP program.

Lynn Ellwood is an Associate Professor at the Department of Speech-Language Pathology and is also an alumnus of the U of T S-LP program, graduating in 1990. She spearheaded her 25th class re-



Photo collages from the U of T S-LP class of 1985 30th reunion.

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On day two of the class reunion event, the classmates and some accompanying family members met at the Royal Canadian Yacht Club on Toronto Island for a barbeque and activities. There was canoeing and kayaking, swimming and biking, and even bocce. For some, the evening ended with dinner on the veranda, watching the sun set.

Lynn reported that over the years, those classmates in close proximity to one another have gotten together periodically. But this was the first attempt at bringing the entire class together. When asked what it has meant to stay in touch with her classmates over the years, her

“ The S-LP program transformed us into young professionals. It formed a bond that was very apparent at the reunion. It's been a joy to watch each person's career trajectory, each meandering along their own unique and often unexpected paths. Plenty of forks in the roads. Watching families form and grow has also been a great pleasure.”

response was “The S-LP program transformed us into young professionals. It formed a bond that was very apparent at the reunion. It's been a joy to watch each person's career trajectory, each meandering along their own unique and often unexpected paths. Plenty of forks in the roads. Watching families form and grow has also been a great pleasure.”

While Lynn and her classmates attended school, U of T was running a fundraising campaign targeting graduating students. The purpose of the Gratitude Campaign was for students to donate back to the University as a way of demonstrating their gratitude to the school and its instructors. Although it was difficult to ask students to

9T0 to make a contribution this year in recognition of 25 years of successful postgraduate career life. For her part, she has started a fund raising campaign in association with her epic sailing adventure that she is currently embarking on, including an option to support the Department of S-LP. Those interested can follow her at: [www.elocution.ca/cliptrip/](http://www.elocution.ca/cliptrip/). Lynn thinks it would be great to start a tradition of giving back to mark milestones for graduate classes.

Lynn's advice to those who are interested in organizing a class reunion is to start early. She used Facebook and LinkedIn to reach out to some of the long-lost members of their group. The S-LP Alumni Association was a great help in the planning stages.

Lynn's class was not the only one to celebrate a milestone reunion. The graduate class of 1985 also organized their 30-year class reunion in 2015. Some of the graduates from this year included Dr. Kim Bradley, Fern Westernoff and Jane Gorman and they provided some pictures of their event, shown above.

The S-LP Alumni Association hosts a yearly Spring Reunion event in May and invites alumni from all graduating classes to attend and reconnect with former classmates and professors. The S-LP Alumni Association would also be happy to help any graduate class with planning a class reunion event. If interested, please get in touch by sending an email to [slp.alumni@utoronto.ca](mailto:slp.alumni@utoronto.ca).

If you have ideas for stories you'd like to see in the newsletter or just want to let us know what you think of it, email us at [slp.alumni@utoronto.ca](mailto:slp.alumni@utoronto.ca) We'd love to hear from you!

## A Reflection on the 2015 J.F. Walker Lecture

### Cognitive Communication: Skills for Successful Living (Sponsored by the Donalda Jean McGeachy Memorial Lecture Series)

By Ayla Alcorn OT9



ON FRIDAY JUNE 12, THE S-LP ALUMNI ASSOCIATION PROUDLY HOSTED the biennial lecture event with over 150 S-LP students and clinicians in attendance. This year's topic was cognitive-communication disorders and covered material relevant to clinicians working with both pediatric and adult populations. For the first time, the event took place in a venue that is fondly remembered by many U of T S-LP alumni - the Great Hall of the Hart House building.

After the success of the expansion from a single lecture to a full half-day event in 2013, the new tradition continued with this larger scale event. The morning began with attendees enjoying a delicious breakfast buffet, followed by mingling with other alumni and students before the lectures began. It was an honour to have Professor Jean Walker in attendance again this year.

First to present was Sheila McDonald, Speech-Language Pathologist of Sheila MacDonald & Associates, in Guelph, Ontario. Sheila's talk entitled "When "Mild" is not Mild", focused on the

management of subtle but significant cognitive-communication difficulties following concussion and other acquired brain injuries. In her usual fashion, Sheila inspired attendees with her knowledge, humour, and passion for helping people



manage communication difficulties after brain injury.

The second speaker was Dr. Gary Turner, a Clinical Psychologist with York University in Toronto. Dr. Turner discussed neural networks in aging and brain disease in the context of assessment and intervention. With a unique perspective on cognition and communication, Dr. Turner engaged the audience with intriguing insights into current research directions in neuroscience and their application to rehabilitation. The material he discussed complimented Sheila's earlier presentation well and generated very interesting clinical discussions.

All in all, the 2015 J.F. Walker Lecture made for another informative and successful event. Students and clinicians shared laughs, enjoyed reunions with classmates, and gained valuable clinical perspectives to consider when assessing and treating individuals with cognitive-communication disorders. The S-LP Alumni Association thanks Professor Jean Walker, the Donalda Jean McGeachy Memorial Lecture Series, and all in attendance who made the morning so memorable. Stay tuned for details of our next J.F. Walker Lecture Event, coming up in 2017!

We hope to see you there.

#### ALUMNI EXECUTIVE 2015-16

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# Remembering a leader in the field of speech-language pathology

By Liam Mitchell



Professor Emerita Margaret Stoicheff

A FORERUNNER IN THE FIELD OF **speech-language pathology** and former professor and chair at the University of Toronto has passed away. Margaret Stoicheff died February 9 at the age of 82.

In her role as a clinician, teacher, mentor, researcher and chair Margaret earned a permanent and prominent place in the department's history and left a lasting impression on former students and colleagues.

Professor Jean Walker remembers her colleague as "one of the early pioneers in speech-language pathology in Ontario. She made an outstanding contribution to the development of the profession, which was recognized by the Ontario Speech-Language Association when she was presented with the Honours of the Association in 1985."

Stoicheff earned her undergraduate and Master's degrees from U of T before earning her PhD from the State University of Iowa. When she joined the Department of Speech-Language Pathology (S-LP), Stoicheff was the first full-time member of the academic staff to hold a PhD. She served as Chair of the Department from 1983 to 1989.

Margaret was also active in the S-LP Alumni Association. Two awards were named in her honour, which are supported by the alumni association. They include a bursary for students in the final year of the clinical Master of Health Science program and the Margaret Stoicheff Spirit Award, which is presented to a student who has been most influential in boosting class spirit throughout the program.

"She was an extremely good teacher and clinician. Her dedication to the advancement of the department was unwavering," said Walker

The alumni association would like to express their condolences to the family. Margaret's dedication and contributions to the department and community will always be remembered.

## Spring Reunion 2016

### S-LP Alumni Mixer

Join us for a Speech-Language Pathology alumni reception! Mingle with fellow UofT S-LP alumni while enjoying drinks and hors d'oeuvres. Afterwards, attend a free panel entitled: "A life with speech and swallowing difficulties after stroke" from a clinician, researcher and patient perspective. The panel is being put on by the Department of S-LP at UofT, in conjunction with OSLA. If you have feedback about this event or have ideas for next year's event, please contact us at [slp.alumni@utoronto.ca](mailto:slp.alumni@utoronto.ca).



**Date:**

**Wednesday,  
MAY 18, 2016**

**Time:**

**5:30 - 7:00 PM**

**Location:**

**Rehabilitation Sciences Building  
500 University Avenue,  
Toronto, ON M5G 1V7**

**Cost:**

**FREE**

**Register:**

<https://springreunion.utoronto.ca/events/find/?faculty=medicine>.

**Are you hosting a reunion event?** If you and your fellow alumni host reunions, or would like to arrange a reunion event, we would love to hear from you! The S-LP Alumni Association invites UofT Alumni reunion groups to contact us. We would be interested in working together on future events.

Please contact us at: [slp.alumni@utoronto.ca](mailto:slp.alumni@utoronto.ca), or on our facebook page, U of T S-LP Alumni at: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/295282260212/>.

### The Alumni Association is going green!

If you would prefer to receive your annual newsletter electronically, send an email with the subject 'SLP alum e-newsletter' to [address.update@utoronto.ca](mailto:address.update@utoronto.ca). Help us make a difference!

# Year One Report

By Anna Mersov, 1T7 & Denise Medina, 1T7

The Speech Language Pathology (S-LP) class of 2017 has had an interesting year thus far. In addition to the incredibly engaging coursework, our class got involved in a couple of side-projects. In December 2015, forty of us joined the Durham District School Board (DDSB) S-LPs in a new initiative to administer an oral language assessment on Kindergarten students identified for delayed oral language and literacy skills. The test focused on narrative skills and phonological awareness, both of which are key predictors of literacy and learning in early grade-school. After a brief training, we were assigned in pairs to meet an S-LP at a specific school location where we each had the opportunity to administer the test to several students. This was a great opportunity for us to get our hands dirty in the real world and to help out in a really great initiative. "Overall the partnership was a great success," says Nancy Sarlo, an S-LP who spear-headed the project, "over 70 percent of DDSB S-LPs agreed that it was beneficial to have student participation and agreed that they would participate in such a project again." As students we also hope that such partnerships will continue in the future, as projects like these allow us to transfer our classroom knowledge to real life experiences in our field.

The second project involved providing school support for a 10-year-old girl with Cerebral Palsy (M.). M. wears a sensor on her throat (the "Hummer") that is able to detect vocal fold vibration to activate a switch connected to her tablet. Designed by Dr. Tom Chau's laboratory at Holland Bloorview, the device dramatically changed M.'s quality of life, as she is now able to express herself, communicate with her family and



friends, and complete her school work. However, all of M.'s school work needs to be modified and programmed into her tablet in order for her to learn and succeed. A small group of us had the opportunity to work with M. and help translate some of her schoolwork to a usable form on her tablet, which has been a challenge. This opportunity allowed us to learn about the day to day struggles and realities for children with Cerebral Palsy and their families. Specifically, it highlighted the important role that S-LPs can play in bridging the gap between AAC technology and its implementation in school by educating teachers and other staff about the language and developmental gains that can be made when the individual is properly accommodated.

# Year Two Report

By Mayzelle Parawan 1T6

In May 2015, in light of Speech, Hearing, and Swallowing Awareness month, the University of Toronto's Speech-Language Pathology Class of 2016 participated in various activities that highlighted the role of Speech Language Pathologists. One of the activities we participated in was the "Thickened Liquid Challenge" proposed by the Speech-Language Pathologists (S-LPs) at the University Health Network (UHN). Andrea Guran and Victoria Currie (Swallowing Lab Assistants) described the challenge as a way to bring awareness to dysphagia and the people who live with swallowing difficulties. During the challenge, the class of 2016 drank a cup of apple or cranberry juice mixed with thickening powder. The resulting liquid had nectar thick consistency. This experience allowed us to get a taste (literally) of our clients' modified diet. It also allowed us to understand the possible reason behind our clients' hesitation or reluctance to comply with diet modification recommendations.



At the end of the challenge, our class nominated the S-LP Faculty at the University of Toronto and Western University's S-LP Class of 2016 to participate in the challenge. You can check out the video of the "Thickened Liquid Challenge" at this link: <http://swallowinglab.com/2015/05/>



Like us on Facebook! The Alumni Association is on Facebook! Find and join us by searching for the "U of T SLP Alumni" group, and clicking "join". It's that easy to stay in touch!



ON NOVEMBER 10, 2015 Dr. Kimberley Bradley (8T5) was presented with the Distinguished Service Award at the annual Awards and Recognition Celebration. In her 30 year clinical career, Kim has worked locally and internationally with both paediatric and adult populations. Kim has been an assistant professor in the S-LP department since obtaining her PhD and is involved in many international projects within the field of S-LP. The Alumni Association is pleased to share an excerpt of Dr. Bradley's acceptance speech with our readers:

At this time could I acknowledge, in particular, all of my colleagues in the neurologically based communication disorders unit through the last 17 years I have been teaching at U of T Elizabeth, Regina, Alice, Rosemary, Paula Square, and many others. When I think about teaching I think most often about students, but today I would like to recognize the impact on me and the example of these sincere and dedicated education and health care professionals.

Last Wednesday, less than a week ago, I was in a meeting with a team of very gifted, prestigious colleagues who have a million dollar CIHR grant. We were sitting around the table when our newest team member wheeled in to join us to bring the patient's perspective to the research discussions.

**Know someone deserving of a Distinguished Service Award?**

Consider nominating your peers! For more information about this award please visit: <http://www.slp.utoronto.ca/alumni/alumni-association/>

She introduced herself confidently, and said she was an undergraduate at U of T. A research assistant then introduced herself as a masters level student and this young woman confidentially replied "I'm going to be where you are in a few year's time" and she pulled up to the table as if she were to the manor born. I was stunned. I knew this young woman, this new colleague, when

she was 15 months old – when she had a life expectancy of 3 or 4 years when she was so low tone that she couldn't lift her limbs. The nurse manager had contacted me saying "I know we don't have speech therapy services on this unit but there is something there," ...and myself and Jenny Wadds, then Jenny McDougall, problemsolved and figured it out and experimented and just made stuff up, and two months later were able to actually formally assess this baby and show that despite having spent her whole wee life trached, vented, medically fragile and in a hospital she was within spitting distance of the norms for her age for receptive language. We got her onto switches and AAC and started the journey of communication, never expecting her to be an oral communicator – not knowing maybe what to expect actually – but knowing that her development was only going to be maximized by people like us making it happen.

That encapsulates what we do as S-LPs and why – the joy and the limitations and the scary danger that we may not get it right. We have miles to go in technology – if this child had ended up dependent upon AAC as it is today, her personality would not have been able to shine like it did.

We have to push to the limits and make demands of the technology we use. We need to make sure we advocate for our clients to go as far as they can go and that means we need to advocate for ourselves and get our act together as a profession to make sure that we have an effective future, because otherwise clients like Sophie won't have one.

We need to use evidence and data and listen to our patients and work to the limits of our scope. We need to reach out to those countries in the world that do not have the resources that we have and share competencies. More and more children



**Yes!** I would like to support the Speech-Language Pathology Alumni Association at the University of Toronto.

The Speech-Language Pathology Alumni Association is constantly striving to improve student life at the Graduate Department of Speech-Language Pathology, University of Toronto. Your financial assistance is invaluable in helping us reach our goals.

**If you wish to participate in improving the student experience you can do so by contacting:**

Donations Management  
J. Robert S. Prichard Alumni House

21 King's College Circle  
Toronto, ON M5S 3J3

**1-800-463-6048 1-416-978-0811**

or visit

<http://donate.utoronto.ca/slp>

and adults in the global south are surviving health challenges – the doctors give them life, but people like us help to make life worth living. To quote Unicef "It is better and cheaper to build strong children than to fix broken adults" what a responsibility, and what a privilege.

I look at what I have done in my career and I have been so lucky. Thirty years on, I still go to work each day believing that the work we do matters. Lori Gottlieb (of strength-based-nursing fame) says that every profession has a social contract – what that profession contributes for which society accords status, respect and remuneration. I know that most of you are at the stage where you are focused on locking in that remuneration, but remember to earn the status and respect as well. I wish you all the luck that I have had in my life, and thank you again for this honour.

## Travelling Abroad

# S-LP Students Reflect on International Placements in the Philippines and Cameroon



By *Jestine Abella, 1T6*

**SINCE I CAN REMEMBER, I always had a desire to travel outside of Toronto, where I lived all of my life, and immerse myself in a new culture. I was fortunate to have the unique opportunity to complete my Unit 7 placement in Cameroon, Africa for 8 weeks.**

After a long grueling flight of 27 hours, spending one night in Douala and an 8-hour drive to the remote village up in the mountains, I finally arrived at Mbingo. Each day was a novel experience and I never knew what to expect. From people wearing beautifully printed fabrics, receiving free bananas on my way to work and learning Pidgin English, I learned a great deal about the rich culture, their value and belief systems, tribal customs and tasty cuisine.

My clinical experience in Cameroon was very diverse, working with patients across the lifespan in a variety of populations in both assessment and treatment capacities. I worked at the Integrated School for the Deaf in the mornings and at Mbingo Baptist Hospital for the remainder of the day. My clinical educator was the only practicing Speech-Language Pathologist in the country; therefore, it came as no surprise to see the ENT department and hospital wards overcrowded with travellers from all over Cameroon. One of the biggest adjustments was struggling with limited resources and making sessions culturally

appropriate. I didn't have standardized test tools readily available, the luxury of lamination and shelves overflowing with toys or resource binders, which I was accustomed to in previous placements. Everyday I had to problem solve on my feet and think creatively. I didn't have access to videofluoroscopy and flexible endoscopy, nor was there a Dietitian to collaborate with. I had to adapt my swallowing assessment using familiar Cameroonian dishes, counsel caregivers on diet modification and use a stethoscope to listen to the swallow. I also developed skills in working with interpreters and learned some key phrases, with patients whose first language is not English. Often, patients were multilingual in French, Pidgin English and their tribal dialect.

This life changing experience has greatly prepared me for my journey once I graduate and become a Speech-Language Pathologist. I would go back in a heartbeat, and can absolutely imagine myself doing international work in countries that are in dire need of speech and language services.



By *Melissa Marasigan, 1T6*

**THE UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO S-LP CLINICAL COORDINATORS, and the International Centre for Disability and Rehabilitation (ICDR) provided a new and unique clinical placement for students. This summer I was granted the opportunity to go to Los Baños, Philippines to complete my clinical practicum at Autism Society Philippines (ASP-Laguna).**

While the landscape of Los Baños, Laguna was incredible, it was truly the learning experience of working with a Filipino-based S-LP and Filipino families that made the placement so memorable. ASP provides services not only to children on the autism spectrum, but also to several special needs populations including families of children with Down Syndrome, cerebral palsy, learning disabilities, and other developmental/genetic disorders.

Under the supervision of a community-based speech pathologist and the Program Director, my role largely consisted of providing assessment, treatment, parent-training, and programming for families. The most insightful and challenging experience was learning about speech and language assessment and treatment with limited resources. In my previous placement, I learned about administering and interpreting common

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assessment tools and scores from standardized tests. Without these tools, I found it both challenging and stimulating to set up play situations and obtain culturally sensitive stimuli to get an accurate sample of a child's speech and language abilities.

I also visited families' homes and schools, and prepared sustainable programming with limited materials. It taught me that you don't need elaborate or expensive materials to create a rich language environment. I also learned about establishing low-tech AAC and how families and caregivers need to be important members of the team.

Lastly, I learned about service delivery models in the Philippines and strategies that institutions like ASP apply to overcome barriers when providing services to children with special needs. Due to the scarcity of S-LPs in the Laguna area, the focus on parent training is emphasized so parents can take on a more active role. This allows a more accessible means of receiving intervention for low-income families who otherwise cannot afford to travel and pay for speech and language services from S-LPs in Manila.

Overall, my time in Los Baños was an incredibly rich and valuable experience. On top of gaining understanding of how Filipino families view communication disorders and disability, it was a privilege to experience Filipino culture and be warmly welcomed by all family members serving ASP. Furthermore, my experience enabled me to see the importance of involving family members in creating sustainable programming and I will remember these insights as I move forward in my clinical practice.

## In Our Field

# Helping People with Aphasia Navigate their Lives One Conversation at a Time



Chris and his wife Marita

**SINCE GRADUATING FROM U OF T IN 2008, I have worked at the Aphasia Institute. U of T gave me a solid foundation to begin my career, amazing memories and lifelong friendships. I continue to stay connected through teaching clinics, volunteering in the Language Sciences Lab and working with Joanne DeLuzio on creating a communicatively accessible hearing screening protocol.**

The Aphasia Institute instilled in me a passion for people with aphasia (PWA) and has influenced who I am as a person. At the Aphasia Institute, I help PWA and their families navigate their lives one conversation at a time.

To illustrate this, I'd like to tell you about our member, Chris. Before a debilitating stroke left him with aphasia and a partial paralysis, Chris was a medical transporter. He drove stroke survivors and others to their medical appointments. He literally helped others navigate their lives. This was also true in his volunteer position with Air Cadets, where Chris was a guide to young people.

After his stroke, Chris could no longer do the things that gave his life meaning. Chris now depended on others to navigate his own life. With the support of his wife Marita, Chris found his way to the Aphasia Institute. I met Chris on his first day in our community aphasia program, and accompanied him to his conversation group. By chance Chris would become reacquainted with someone from his past. At the table was a woman he used to drive to medical appointments. I witnessed the

By Lisa Samson, OT8

moment they met. Tears flowed as they recognized each other. In that moment Chris had a choice. He could see this as a reminder of all that he had lost or take this as an opportunity. He chose the latter and together they started to navigate their new journey with aphasia.

Currently, Chris participates in as many programs as possible. He has regained his confidence, independence and a feeling of

normalcy. He has returned to community volunteering, where once again he is able to give back to others.

Supporting members like Chris is why I appreciate being an S-LP. I have the privilege of learning from clients while enabling them to learn from each other. I am reminded daily of what is really important in life and the power of a positive perspective.

Without the Aphasia Institute's commitment to never turning anyone away for an inability to pay, Chris and many other members could not have attended our programs. The Aphasia Institute's Signature Event, the Walk, Talk 'n Roll, affords us the ability to fund services for our clients, as well as our research and education initiatives.

### Invitation

I invite all alumni to visit our webpage [www.aphasia.ca/walk-n-roll](http://www.aphasia.ca/walk-n-roll) and participate in any of the following ways:

- **Donate**
- **Fundraise**
- **Walk, Talk or Roll with us on June 12**
- **Virtual Walk – if you can't join us on June 12**

We can reconnect and reminisce while supporting people with communication disorders.



## Research Corner

# Measuring Causes of Chronic Dysphagia for Patients Following Radiotherapy for Head and Neck Cancer



STEPHANIE SHAW WASN'T SURE WHAT SHE WAS GOING TO BE WHEN SHE GREW UP but she knew it had to involve mathematics and creativity. After completing the Strong Interest Inventory, she entered the Communication Disorders undergraduate program at Brigham Young University. However it wasn't until 2006 when she started her Master's degree in S-LP that she discovered dysphagia.

During this time, her grandmother was diagnosed with a chronic swallowing impairment, and a research career with dysphagia as her focus was born.

### Q: What is the focus of your research?

My research focuses on identifying and measuring the underlying causes of chronic dysphagia post-radiotherapy for head and neck cancer. Recent literature has demonstrated that our current dysphagia interventions have limited success when used with this population.

To date, most people believe that these chronic swallowing problems are caused by radiation-related fibrosis (the thickening and scarring of connective tissue) that occurs in and around the swallowing muscles. So, as a first step, I have sought to develop a measurement technique that can be used to actually measure fibrosis (presence and severity) within these target regions. My PhD supervisor, Dr. Rosemary Martino, has extensive experience with designing and evaluating new measurement tools. So far, we have conducted a pilot test on healthy normal subjects and have found good intra-rater reliability. From here, we hope to test this device with head and neck cancer patients who have had radiation to see if it can accurately identify and measure fibrosis.

### Q: How are you approaching this field in a different, unexpected, or unusual way?

Many researchers have looked at swallowing physiology. To date, no researchers have looked at the structural changes that occur within the swallowing-related muscles in patients with dysphagia. However, these physiological changes have a structural underpinning and we do not yet have a way to measure these structural changes. My hope is that we can actually develop valid and reliable tools that allow us to identify and measure the structural changes that occur in patients with dysphagia. Looking at dysphagia in this way will allow us to think of new and innovative solutions we can use to treat our patients, thereby improving patient outcomes.

By Amy Dhindsa, 1T4

### Q: Why is what you do important?

Imagine waking up one morning not being able to swallow. This may seem like a nightmare, but it is a waking reality for many of our patients. Swallowing problems can lead to malnutrition, dehydration, anxiety, depression, social isolation, reduced quality of life, pneumonia, and even death. While interventions have been developed to improve swallowing in patients with swallowing impairment, many patients still continue to experience problems with their swallowing, even after treatment. The purpose of my research is to develop tools that can be used to identify (and measure) the underlying problem (structural changes to the swallowing muscles).

### Q: How does your research knowledge translate to clinical work?

Ultimately, I hope to be able to provide clinicians with a feasible way to identify and measure structural changes within the swallowing-related muscles so that patient-specific intervention plans can be developed that actually target the underlying problem(s).

Helping patients using a patient-specific approach is what we are all aiming for. We look forward to hearing more about your measurement tool in the near future. Thank you Stephanie for taking the time to talk with me, especially with a busy 18-month-old in your life!

Newsletter layout by Steven Janovsky