

The Journey from Nil By Mouth to Christmas Lunch



New ESTHER coach and Speech and Language Therapist Belinda Walker and ESTHER Colin Black (Wilfred) talk about Colin's journey back from 'nil by mouth' tube feeding to eating Christmas lunch with his wife.

When Speech and Language Therapist Belinda Walker received a referral for Colin after his stroke, she admits her heart sank. The prognosis, on paper, did not look good. His stroke had left him with severe dysphagia (swallowing disorder) and it seemed unlikely that he would make much of a recovery. She went to meet him and was before she had even taken her jacket off, he said 'I will be able to eat again, won't I? I so want to eat'. It was early October, and he said that, more than anything, he wanted to eat Christmas lunch when the time came. Here was something that mattered to ESTHER, yet this looked like it would be very hard to achieve.

Belinda checked the exercises given to him to by colleagues at the William Harvey and added some new ones. Colin was diligent in carrying them out and soon began trying sips of water. As the weeks passed, more fluids and small amounts of pureed foods were added. Colin's chest remained clear and he began keeping a food and fluid chart himself and wrote down how many times he had performed the exercises.

The ESTHER ethos was picked up by the home and staff involved with Colin. He had his breakfast at 7.30, so Belinda arrived at that time so he could eat at his preferred time. The chef at the home prepared lovely small breakfasts and lunches – all well-presented and of the right texture. He also provided this food at unusual times outside the normal 'meal run'. Medical staff monitored his chest and nurses sat with him to ensure his enthusiasm for eating was kept in check by gently reminding him of the safe swallow strategies. Even the other residents cheered from the sidelines – Colin is an amiable man who struck up many friendships.

Swept away on this tide of goodwill, he kept to his exercise goal and at Christmas was able to enjoy a small, slightly modified texture Christmas meal with his wife. His wife had also been unwell but was given a clean bill of health so this meal was a double celebration!

Belinda says 'Colin was real joy to work with. By changing work patterns and involving everyone at Wells House care home, he was able to achieve his dream. At times he needed to be held back! He was keen to try more and more but hopefully the good relationship between Colin, myself and the other care staff contributed to the fact he was prepared to hold back and follow what must have seemed like over-cautious precautions. I could see the ESTHER approach in action here. It is difficult when what an ESTHER wants to achieve looks difficult on paper. We always have to be mindful of being hopeful yet realistic about what can be done. Colin said 'I cannot believe I am eating! It is marvellous!'