

Dear Members of ESSD,

Dear Colleagues and friends,

Worldwide we are facing a challenge of enormous magnitude with the spread of COVID-19. The current crisis is bringing us as health professionals to our limits and many new clinical uncertainties arise. There is a lot we still need to learn about the management of dysphagic patients during or post-COVID infection.

The European Society of Swallowing Disorders is committed to the health and well-being of its members and the health care of patients with dysphagia. We stand with you in solidarity during this unprecedented situation and want to support you during this difficult time. As a response to COVID-19, the ESSD board and executive want to accommodate our communication channels to the current needs of our members, listen to your concerns and questions, provide you with the latest updates and share the available best practise information. Therefore, the ESSD board has decided on the following actions:

ACCOMMODATE: Due to global and local restrictions, international travel and unlimited personal interaction has almost come to a stop. As it remains unclear what the situation will be in autumn, the ruling social distancing measures, counting the risks related to traveling in these days and most of all to protect the safety of our members, **the 10th ESSD congress will be organised as an 'ESSD virtual congress' online and not in person in Girona. All ESSD accreditation courses in 2020 will be rescheduled.** We will duly inform you in due course on the exact details. Most important for now is that ESSD strongly encourages you to submit your abstracts as the 2020 'ESSD virtual congress' will include e-posters and oral presentations. All accepted abstracts will be published in Dysphagia Journal. We are delighted to see that our clinicians and scientists are still submitting their work to the ESSD congress despite many personal and professional priorities at the moment. In order to avoid additional pressure and deadlines on our members in these strenuous times, we are pleased to announce that the **abstract submission deadline has been extended** from May 4th 2020 **to July 4th 2020**. By giving more time for your submissions and opening a new abstract topic on COVID 19, we like to make our contribution. Equally, ESSD will do its utmost to ensure that the recent important and relevant research on dysphagia can be presented online and published this year.

LISTEN: The care of dysphagia in (post)COVID-19 patients is new to all of us. This unseen situation raises many questions related to the clinical presentation of patients, dysphagia assessment and management, protocols, patient and caregiver safety and protection. As it is crucial as a professional community to interact on what is currently happening and known, we have set up a dedicated **Dysphagia and COVID-19 forum** to listen to your questions and concerns. We encourage all members to post questions and share their experiences in relation to dysphagia care in COVID-19

times. A dedicated team of experts will answer your questions with the best available evidence and knowledge. Please visit and contact us via myessd.org. A new banner is on the ESSD home page: ESSD Response to COVID-19.

SHARE: ESSD is aware that all health professionals in dysphagia care are affected by this pandemic and that many have to work in difficult circumstances. Therefore, we will also provide access to a selection of our **ESSD webinars over recent years** to all colleagues working in the field of dysphagia to give easy access to basic education free and for a limited time. We hope this basic level of support in times like this may find your support. Please visit our website (myessd.org) to find the link to this service and feel free to share it with all your colleagues. On these pages, ESSD will also post important information, news, guidance and scientific articles by specialists and our colleague dysphagia societies, which we will be pleased to disseminate. The **Livestream ESSD webinar on the 15th of April at 6.30 pm** will be fully dedicated to COVID-19, the webinar is free as always and you register through the ESSD website www.myessd.org.

LEARN: Dysphagia care during COVID-19 pandemic is new and the working circumstances of our professionals are greatly challenging. Whether a COVID-19 specific dysphagia exists or whether the clinical presentation of dysphagia is altered by COVID-19 remains unclear at this moment. To improve our understanding of the current situation in Europe, we invite and encourage you as a member to participate in the **ESSD survey on Dysphagia during COVID-19**. The aim of this survey (5 minutes duration), online from 10th of April onwards, is to characterize the challenges of clinicians during this time. Please visit myessd.org to see the link to access the survey. The results will be communicated at the ESSD virtual congress.

Finally, we realise that crisis moments also present opportunities. We believe we will face improved care of our dysphagia patients, more sophisticated and flexible use of technology and virtual meetings. How the COVID-19 pandemic will affect our work in the coming months is difficult to say, but we would like to look at the near future with optimism. Meanwhile stay safe and take care of yourself and your families.

With kind regards,

Nathalie Rommel

President of the ESSD, on behalf of the ESSD Board.