



STATE OF MARYLAND

DHMH

Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene

201 W. Preston Street • Baltimore, Maryland 21201

Robert L. Ehrlich, Jr., Governor - Arlene H. Stephenson, Acting Secretary

EDUCATIONAL ALERT !!!

TO: All DDA Service Providers

FROM: Diane K. Coughlin, Director *DKC*
Developmental Disabilities Administration

Carol Benner, Director *CB*
Office of Health Care Quality

SUBJECT: Regular monitoring and follow-up of individualized nutrition plans especially for individuals at risk of choking

The Mortality Review Committee (MRC) was established by the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DHMH) through legislation effective October 2001. The MRC evaluates causes or factors contributing to deaths of individuals in programs or facilities operated or licensed by the Developmental Disabilities Administration and the Mental Hygiene Administration.

The Mortality Review Committee (MRC) has identified the lack of staff adherence to appropriate procedures for food preparation and the monitoring of meals as an issue. Therefore we are requesting your immediate attention to this concern.

- Many of the individuals served by your agencies are predisposed to develop swallowing and aspiration disorders that are aggravated by inattention to meal preparation and/or presentation.
- To ensure the health and safety of the individuals for whom you provide services, it is imperative that you identify those individuals who may be at risk and develop an appropriate plan to address these issues.
- The individual plan needs to reflect precautions recommended by your skilled health professionals for individuals identified to be at risk.
- Please remind all staff of the importance of adhering to the special mealtime precautions identified in an individual's plan.
- Failure to implement an individual's plan is in direct violation with our regulations, COMAR10.22.05. and, more importantly, has proven to be fatal in some instances.
- Regardless of the plan an individual who stuffs large amounts of food into his/her mouth is likely to have difficulty swallowing at some point in time. Similarly the individual without teeth who is given a ham and cheese sandwich without it being presented in smaller pieces is also placed at risk over time.

Working together we can reduce avoidable injury and death. Thank you for your attention to this important issue.