

Cancers affecting organs used for speech and communication

Cancer can affect organs we use for speech, such as the tongue and larynx. The larynx is sometimes called the voice box.

This brief factsheet highlights some of the impacts these cancers may have on communication.

It identifies general practical action you can take to remove barriers to participation that people with these cancers may face. Remember every person is different.

Cancers affecting organs used for speech can impact on the clarity of the person's speech. It can make it more difficult for a listener to understand what the person is saying. If surgery is required, a person might have to adopt a different way of speaking.

For example, a person who has had a laryngectomy (removal of the voice box) may speak using:

- a hand held electronic device
- a speech valve implant
- a variety of different physical techniques to deliver their speech.

Not all laryngectomees (people who have had a laryngectomy) will sound the same. Voice quality will differ from person to person.

Some people will lack confidence because of these changes.

Key actions

To make it easier for people to express themselves fully, make sure you:

- give everyone enough time to get their message across
- provide a quiet environment
- offer the person the opportunity to meet one-to-one, rather than in a group
- provide an amplification system for talking in a larger group.

Further information:

National Association of Laryngectomy Clubs (www.laryngectomy.org.uk)
Macmillan Cancer Support Scotland (www.macmillan.org.uk)