VOICE IMPROVEMENT FOLLOWING A SINGING AND VOCALIZATION PROGRAM FOR PEOPLE WITH PARKINSON'S DISEASE

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Introduction: Voice problems are common in Parkinson's disease and often have such far reaching consequences as withdrawal from socialization, decreased advancement at work and sometimes depression. The first author, a speech-language pathologist and singer, developed a vocalization program that included singing to improve the voices of people with Parkinson's disease in her clinical practice. The approach offered an engaging way to improve communication functioning using a real life activity, thus improving the likelihood of maintenance of vocal skills gained.

Aims: The goal of the study was to test the effect of the protocol by comparing the acoustic measures of intensity and frequency and indirect measures of respiratory support for phonation before treatment and after treatment.

Methods: 29 people with Parkinson's disease were tested twice before and twice after a vocalization treatment program. The program involved two 90-minute group sessions per week that included vocal exercises and singing with piano accompaniment.

Results: Marked improvements in frequency variability during reading and conversation tasks and overall maximum frequency and intensity ranges were found.

Conclusions: The vocalization and singing program developed produced increases in frequency variability exhibited in normal conversation and oral reading tasks. Frequency variability is an acoustic correlate of inflection and expression and is indicative of greater laryngeal flexibility. Future studies need to assess the impact of this type of vocalization program on swallowing skills.