

SOUTHWESTERN NEWS

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EXPERTS AID CHILDREN WHO CAN'T HELP DROOLING

DALLAS – April 10, 1998 – A UT Southwestern Medical Center at Dallas physician is leading an unusual team effort to help children who drool excessively or uncontrollably.

"The harm from drooling is more psychological than physical," said Dr. Kathleen Billings, assistant professor of otorhinolaryngology. "There may be some chafing on the chin, but we mainly want to see if we can eliminate the social stigma the children suffer."

Billings, a pediatric ear-nose-and-throat specialist, has teamed up with a speech pathologist and a children's dentist to offer a monthly clinic on drooling. Many of the children they treat are mentally retarded or have a disorder such as cerebral palsy, although otherwise healthy children also can have drooling problems. Each child receives an ear, nose and throat examination, a swallowing evaluation and a dental check in a single visit.

"We want to know what factors are contributing to the problem and determine whether we can improve it," she said.

Some children can reduce drooling with exercises that improve their oral motor abilities or with a correction of a dental overbite. Billings said children may benefit from other options, which include surgery to have their tonsils removed or their salivary ducts moved from under the tongue to the back of the mouth.

Billings, speech pathologist Renee Lavelle and dentist Dr. Michael Webb conduct the drooling clinic in the otorhinolaryngology department at Children's Medical Center of Dallas on the third Tuesday of each month.

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