A retrospective audit of initiation of oral nutrition post head and neck cancer surgery at a regional centre - preliminary findings

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Background:
Patients with head and neck cancer (HNC) are at risk of malnutrition as a result of tumour site, disease process, surgery and treatment. Optimal timing of oral feeding post-operatively in HNC is unknown and the impact of early oral feeding continues to be researched. This study will measure the timeframe from day of surgery to initiation of oral feeding and examine whether there is an association with weight loss, post-operative complication rates and length of stay.

Methods:
Data were collected from medical charts of patients that had major HNC surgery performed between June 2021 and June 2022 at SIVUH.

Preliminary Results:
Forty patients were included in this study, of which 14 had laryngectomy surgery. Mean timeframe for commencement of oral diet was 33.3 days, post laryngectomy was 42.6 days and post other oral sites was 26.8 days. Average weight loss during admission was 1.3kg (1.6% weight loss). Post-operative complications included: reflux 5/38 (12.8%), fistula 4/38 (10.5%), flap failure 6/38 (15.8%), aspiration pneumonia 3/39 (7.7%)

Conclusion:
Once statistical analysis is completed, our findings will investigate whether timely initiation of oral feeding influences nutritional and post-operative outcomes. This may influence the development of post-operative HNC surgery nutrition protocol.