

Care of the Professional Voice

Hiroya Yamaguchi MD., Ph D.

Department Director of Otolaryngology and Head and Neck Surgery
Tokyo Senbai Hospital, Japan

Introduction:

My experience in the treatment of vocal disorders among professional singers within the past year revealed the importance of vocal hygiene for the maintenance of a better quality of voice. Therefore, the importance of vocal hygiene is discussed.

Materials:

I have treated 76 singers at our hospital within the past year with the majority of the patients being in the age range of 20's and 30's in which 18 were classic singers and 58 were non-classic singers. Among the 76 singers treated, 64 were professional singers, 4 were semi-professional singers and the remaining were amateur singers. Stroboscopic examination revealed 15 inflammation cases, 41 vocal cord nodule cases, 8 laryngeal polyp cases and 12 cases of non-specified vocal disorders (others).

Treatment Methods:

Patients with vocal cord nodules or laryngeal polyps with concomitant inflammation or just plain inflammation cases, both pharmaceutical treatment and voice therapy were utilized. It is of major importance that proper guidance for voice therapy is given.

Voice therapy consists of voice rest, guidance of vocal hygiene and voice training.

Discussion:

Vocal disorders among professional singers are resultant mainly due to these factors:

1. Vocal abuse, this not due to the singing technique of the individual but mainly due to the number of performances, the size of the auditorium, background noise, post-performance parties, etc. These factors are thought to be causative agents of vocal abuse leading to vocal disorders.
2. Dryness, modern facilities like the hotel, airplanes, local transportation systems, and the auditorium where the individual performs are usually equipped with air conditioners, thus extreme dryness of the vocal cord mucous occurs which

leads to vocal disorders. These conditions can be prevented with hydration therapy.

3. Psychiatric and psychological problems, this is always a factor usually associated with professional singers who are under constant pressure.

4. Reflux esophagitis, this is not a major factor which is often encountered in Japan as a causative factor for vocal disorders among professional singers. But in European countries, this is of major importance and problem among professional singers. At present, Professor Niimi's group and myself are evaluating the pharyngolaryngeal findings with the esophageal findings to see if there is a correlation or relationship between the two.

Guidance of vocal hygiene is conducted on an one-on-one basis where the individual is explained in detail what he or she must do to obtain curative results and to prevent the recurrence of the vocal disorder. It is extremely important that ample time is used during these discussion periods.

Conclusion:

Satisfactory results with voice therapy for vocal cord nodules have been reported but complete cure or curative results are quite difficult to establish. Furthermore, in cases in which stroboscopic examination revealed solid or hard vocal cord nodules, surgical excision may be necessary before voice therapy. As for laryngeal polyps, after surgical excision, it is mandatory that the individual strictly obeys to at least one month of voice rest. Concurrently, vocal hygiene is instructed to prevent recurrence.

In Japan, the professional singers have a very tight schedule, thus there is only a limited amount of time to treat the individual. In many cases, favorable results must be attained for the individuals, thus symptomatic treatment with strong antibiotics, anti-inflammatory agents and at times steroids have been utilized, this is not the actual treatment method recommended and recurrence rates of the vocal disorders are high. Therefore, the necessity and the importance of vocal hygiene must be taken into consideration if one is to attain more than satisfactory results or curative results