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# Media Release

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## For Immediate Release

### **Too few dietitians spells disaster for delivery of Government's health agenda**

**With the start of the New Year thoughts often turn to improving our health – but where are the experts who can guide us?**

**Figures just released from the British Dietetic Association's New Graduates Survey have revealed a major shortage of jobs: only 40% of dietitians from the class of 2006 have found employment as a dietitian. With nutrition and a healthy diet so high on the current political agenda, this could spell disaster for the delivery of the ambitious target to stem the tide of obesity across the UK, as well as putting patients' health at risk from lengthy waiting lists.**

UK governments have indicated need for more dietitians to meet the health needs of the population and introduce new ways of working in the NHS. Health policy – such as the Department of Health's Choosing Health document – needs the skills of dietitians if targets for preventing and reducing obesity across the country are to be met.

Many new graduate dietitians, who, ironically, are trained through the investment of taxpayers' money to meet the health needs of the UK population, have to work in admin or sales jobs to give them an income as they cannot find employment in the NHS or in other organisations that employ dietitians.

The financial crisis in the NHS, as employers fight to balance the books, is resulting in the freezing of vacancies for dietitians and some other Allied Health Professionals (AHPs, including Physiotherapists and Speech and Language Therapists). Restructuring in the NHS is not only affecting senior management jobs but also resulting in dietitians being threatened with redundancy.

Judith Catherwood, Honorary Chairman of the British Dietetic Association, said: "The NHS and other public sector providers need the skills of dietitians to meet the strategic priorities of all four UK governments. Dietitians will be critical to the implementation of nutritional screening and better hospital food programmes, preventing malnutrition in hospitals. They are also essential to the success of changes in school food and nutrition, educating and changing perceptions. Dietitians are also important parts of the multi-disciplinary team working with people who have diabetes, gastrointestinal problems, are recovering from surgery or who have had a heart attack helping them to get better quickly and prevent further ill health.

"Many of the current targets for waiting times for treatment and reducing unnecessary hospital admissions depend on rapid access to dietitians' unique skills. Government targets, which aim to improve health and reduce waiting times, will fail to be met if dietetic graduates are frozen out of employment within the health sector."

Jessica Fisher, Student Observer on the BDA Council and a second year student dietitian, said: "Many students have taken on board substantial debt in order to pursue their chosen career in dietetics. Graduate unemployment is forcing students to question whether it is worth the three or four year commitment when there is either a strong chance of unemployment or financial pressure to work in non-dietetic roles upon graduation. If steps are not taken urgently to improve graduate employment within the NHS, the situation can only spiral when the next student cohort graduates."

The current situation is significantly worse than in previous years. The survey was completed in late 2006 as a result of problems raised by new graduate dietitians. Eighty-seven percent of 2005 and 2006 graduates felt it was challenging, very challenging or impossible to get a job as a dietitian in the public sector at present. Almost 50% of those who were lucky enough to get a post after completing their training and becoming registered as a Dietitian with the Health Professions Council are employed on temporary contracts.

The BDA is calling for all four home country government health departments to work with all partners, NHS and public sector employers to address the situation through:

1. Prioritising the current problems of new graduate recruitment of Dietitians and other AHPs and seeking to work with relevant employers to actively use the skills of dietitians to address health inequalities and improve waiting times for dietetic and other health services through service redesign
2. Offering all new graduate dietitians a one-year post-registration job guarantee to provide a foot on the career ladder and allow them to develop their skills

3. Delivering and funding post-registration education for experienced dietitians to enable accelerated development of skills to fill vacant specialist posts, freeing opportunities for new recruits
4. Further developing workforce planning processes to ensure government targets and plans translate into effective workforce plans at regional level, maximising the use of public money and using dietetic skills at all levels effectively.

ENDS

### Notes

1. The BDA new-graduates' survey was carried out in late 2006 with responses from 233 newly-qualified dietitians.

2. Media enquiries to the British Dietetic Association should be directed to Dr Frankie Phillips (0870 850 2517) email [pr@bda.uk.com](mailto:pr@bda.uk.com)

3. The British Dietetic Association, founded in 1936, is the professional Association for registered dietitians in Great Britain and Northern Ireland. It is the nation's largest organisation of food and nutrition professionals with over 5,000 members. About two-thirds of members are employed in the National Health Service. The remaining members work in education, industry, research, sport settings or freelance. Registered dietitians hold the only legally recognised graduate qualification in nutrition and dietetics. They are experts in interpreting and translating the science of nutrition into practical ways of promoting nutritional well-being, disease treatment and the prevention of nutrition-related problems. Their advice is sound and based on current scientific evidence. Registration, awarded by the Health Professionals Council, is an indication that a dietitian is fit to practise and is working within an agreed statement of conduct.

4. For further details about the British Dietetic Association, please visit our website: [www.bda.uk.com](http://www.bda.uk.com) Also, see our Weight Wise website with some great information put together by registered dietitians specifically for consumers at: [www.bdaweightwise.com](http://www.bdaweightwise.com) and [www.teenweightwise.com](http://www.teenweightwise.com) .