



**dietitians:
working to
improve public
health through
nutrition**

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Public Health Nutrition is the promotion of good health through nutrition in order to reduce diet related illness in the population. The emphasis is on the health and well being in the whole population by developing programmes that consider all aspects of the 'farm to fork' food chain and the wider determinants of good health, with a wide range of partners at local, regional and national levels.

The increased emphasis on promoting public health and reducing health inequalities has provided great opportunities for dietitians. The unique knowledge, skills and experience of dietitians support the delivery of the public health agenda, in particular that of public health nutrition.

This leaflet serves to demonstrate the range and variety of work that dietitians are involved in within the field of public health, the knowledge, skills and experience that they bring to this area and how their work contributes to the UK government's public health agendas. Most dietitians contribute to public health, as whatever aspect of nutrition they may be involved with, there will be an element of supporting dietary change to promote well being and prevent ill health.

This leaflet outlines the role that dietitians have in public health nutrition, specifically those who specialise in this field and choose to use the title 'public health dietitian'. Supporting this work are dietetic assistants who may also have a public health role.

Policy context, the challenges and the contribution of Dietitians

Many recent policy documents^{1,8,11,18} place emphasis on preventive health care and health improvement . The fully engaged scenario described in the Wanless report (2002) emphasises the importance of public health as a long term strategy for the health of the population.

> They have skills in leadership and communication and continue to develop new ways of working to better deliver support for the needs of the communities in which they work <



Pam Harvey is a Community Dietitian working in South Devon involved in a range of practical work to increase the awareness of the link between nutrition and health including work on school meals, work with Surestart, Homestart, Teignbeat (a local heartbeat type award) and group education for type 2 diabetes. She has also been involved in writing and is now developing the local obesity strategy.

Three current strategy^{2,12,23} documents from the Health Departments of England, Wales and Scotland describe the contributions that Allied Health Professionals (AHPs), including dietitians, make in delivering on the various health agendas, including work in public health. Across the UK a series of policies/strategies/initiatives/services have been developed to implement the public health and public health nutrition agenda (some of the main ones are listed in Appendix I).

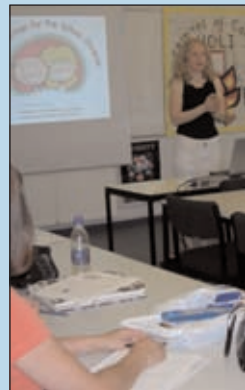
Dietitians and Public Health Nutrition

- > Dietitians are graduates uniquely qualified to translate the science of nutrition into safe, impartial, practical and up to date food based guidance for individuals and groups, and to develop policies that promote good health and reduce diet related disease in communities.
- > Dietetics is the practical application of nutrition in health and disease. The professional training includes scientific and social sciences as well as epidemiology and research surveillance and evaluation, providing all dietitians with the foundations for developing public health competencies.
- > Dietitians are trained in a broad range of practices across the profession. An established system of continuous professional development post-qualification supports deeper understanding and more expert practice in more specialist fields.
- > A public health dietitian is likely to have at least 5 years experience of working as a dietitian within a health care or community setting and will be experienced in collaborative partnership working before specialising in public health nutrition.

Helen Zambas is a Children's Community Dietitian working in a team to provide 'Watchit', a family exercise and nutrition education programme for children aged 8-16 years. The young person attends the programme for a year, and this consists of one-to-ones, group activity and residentials. There are then graduation evenings where young people get a 'bronze', 'silver' or 'gold' award depending on how far through the course they are.

Dietitians have been involved in the development of the programme, an induction programme for health trainers who are involved in its delivery and then continue to be involved in the programme by offering support and supervision to the health trainers. The health trainers are from a range of backgrounds including ex counsellors, personal trainers, sports co-ordinators.

Andrea Basu, Community Development Dietitian, working alongside other Community Dietitians in Wales (CDiW) has been involved in developing and delivering Open College Network (OCN) Accredited Community Food and Nutrition skills courses. These courses (part funded by The Welsh Assembly Government), aim to provide a basic level of knowledge on food and nutrition for those working with key groups in the community for example, pre-school playgroup workers, youth workers, school cooks, leisure centre staff and elderly luncheon club organisers so that healthy eating messages are cascaded into the community. The course won the Therapy Awards - Innovation in Practice, North East Wales NHS Trust, and has served to raise the profile of dietitians locally and nationally. The involvement with The Welsh Assembly has contributed to the announcement of an increase in dietetic capacity across Wales to run more of the courses.



- > A dietitian working in public health nutrition has practical experience of working with individuals to achieve dietary change and has an understanding of the cultural, social, economic and psychological factors that determine behaviour change. This experience is vital in planning or implementing public health programmes that aim to change the diet of a community.
- > Dietitians have many skills that transfer from clinical practice including many of the recognised competencies required for work in public health.
- > Dietitians are trained in communication skills that enable them to use appropriate language/non verbal communication to deliver information to a range of audiences.
- > Dietitians are the only nutrition professionals, with a legally protected title regulated by the Health Professions Council (HPC), acknowledged by all Government departments and the National Health Service. The protected title requires dietitians to demonstrate competence to practice throughout their career to ensure that they retain their skills to practice safely and effectively within their evolving scope of practice (HPC 2005).
- > The Community Nutrition Group is a specialist group of the BDA and supports Public Health Dietitians by providing a forum for training and information exchange.

Dietitians working in Public Health

The Department of Health describes three broad categories of people working in public health. Dietitians can be found working in roles within all three domains:

- 1) Those whose job includes an element of health improvement and reducing inequalities. For many dietitians this is a part of their clinical role in supporting patients and their carers eg
 - i) A dietitian developing and running Diabetes Education Sessions.
 - ii) A dietitian providing heart health advice.
- 2) Professionals that spend a major part, or all of their time, in public health practice. e.g. public health dietitians
- 3) Public health specialists who work at a strategic or senior management level or at a senior level of scientific expertise.



Linda Convery, Community Development Dietitian leads the Community Development Team in Rochdale. The team are currently funded by Sure Start, Neighbourhood Renewal and Healthy Living Initiative although funding bodies have varied over the years. It consists of Nutritionists, a Food Development Officer and a number of Community Food Workers to meet the needs of Sure Start, Neighbourhood Renewal and Healthy Living Initiative projects.

In addition to leading a team, key to her role is writing bids for funding, project management and working with other agencies in partnerships such as school meals and the Healthy Living Initiative. Linda has also contributed to the recently completed Lifestyle Strategy.

Dietitians work collaboratively as part of both dietetic teams and multi-agency teams, with a range of organisations recognising that improved nutrition and health policy delivery requires a co-ordinated approach.

They have skills in leadership and communication and continue to develop new ways of working to better deliver support for the needs of the communities in which they work.

The future for dietitians in public health

The policy agenda continues to place emphasis on promoting good health and well being. There is recognition that reducing nutrition related illness is vital to achieving this goal. There is going to be a continuing and increasing need for people with nutrition/dietetic skills to work in this specialist area of public health nutrition.

Dietitians are ideally placed to further develop the field of public health nutrition.

Work is being carried out:

- > by the BDA - to provide guidance for dietitians working in public health on how to develop competencies to work in this field
- > by the Department of Health - development of National Occupation Standards for Public Health Practice (2004); development of National Standards for Specialist Practice in Public Health (2001)
- > by the UK Voluntary Register for Specialists in Public Health - a retrospective recently defined specialist portfolio assessment, recognising public health nutrition as one of a number of specialist areas that provides professional recognition for staff working at a senior level.

The BDA promotes the role of the public health dietitian as a specialist area of work within the profession, and believes these roles and opportunities will expand our profession. Dietitians have many of the skills to undertake these roles and can develop further responsibilities given opportunities and a recognised set of required competencies. This is an emerging area of practice for dietetic professionals. Using a public health dietitian adds value to the public health workforce.

For more information on the role of dietitians in public health, contact The Education and Professional Development Team at the BDA (www.bda.uk.com) or The BDA Community Nutrition Group, www.cnguk.org

Kathy Cowbrough is a Dietitian working in public health on a consultancy basis involved in a variety of PR work for example, providing ideas and scripts for newsletters for food companies or organisations, summarising journal articles to provide evidence for certain nutrition claims, commenting on nutrition formulation of a proposed new product or evaluating local healthy eating projects and assisting with delivery of nutrition training for the Department of Health's new welfare food scheme 'Healthy Start'.

> Dietitians also work on a consultancy basis and are involved in a wide range of work including work with local communities and delivering training

> There are also dietetic assistants working within the area of Public Health. <

A community dietetic assistant working at a training centre for young people encouraged one young man, about to be dismissed from the centre for disruptive behaviour caused by his alcohol misuse, to do an Open College Network (OCN) accredited course in healthy eating. The young man enjoyed the course and on successful completion he assisted the community dietetic assistant with subsequent cook-and-eat sessions. Obtaining the OCN qualification led him to enrol on a catering course at the local college. His confidence and self esteem improved and he would like to use his passion for cooking in a teaching role. He was invited to attend the Healthy Living Partnership AGM to speak personally about his achievements and said, ' I would be in prison now if I hadn't met X'.



> Dietitians involved in public health work are employed by a variety of organisations including the NHS, Local Authorities, Government Agencies, Research/Education establishments, Industry and Charities. <

Eileen Steinbock is a dietitian working for Brakes, a business delivering wholesale food to the catering market. As Head of Health and Nutrition at Brakes, Eileen works with a technical department that includes food technologists and food microbiologists as well as another nutritionist.

Eileen is involved in 'Healthier Solutions' which includes: providing the tools and information to enable customers to develop healthier menus, a range of quality prepared products meeting strict nutritional criteria, nutritional and dietetic guidance from the nutrition team, supporting customers with menu plans and recipes to help them develop healthier menus including pub and hotel chains and supporting relevant initiatives such as 5 A DAY.

Eileen's work gives great reach into the world of catering, and provides an opportunity to encourage healthier menus in all types of catering.



Dr Judy Lawrence is a lecturer at the University of Surrey and has carried out some research for the Food Standards Agency (FSA) on adapting a cooking skills/healthy eating pack for use with ethnic minority groups, particularly young women from Somalia and Zimbabwe. Focus groups were held with four populations, the results of which were used to modify CookWell, an existing cooking skills pack. This was then evaluated in Somali, Zimbabwean, Pakistani/Bengali and young Caucasian populations in Dundee and Luton. The pack can be used by dietitians or community health workers to run 10 week healthy eating/cooking skills courses with ethnic minority groups in their own area.

Diane Talbot is a dietitian who worked in the community and within the field of public health for over 20 years, and is now using her skills and experience in the role of acting Director of Public Health, which she has been doing since November 2005. This includes ensuring with the PCT director lead on the Local Strategic Partnership that information on health needs and actions to address the determinants of health are incorporated on the agenda of partner agencies to promote and protect the populations health and well-being.

Joyce Thompson is a Dietetic Consultant in Public Health who led a multi-agency best value review of nutrition activities across the Tayside region of Scotland. The review covered a wide range of services and interventions that were delivered by various organisations including the NHS, local authorities, commercial organisations, voluntary organisations and further education institutes. It aimed to bring together a disparate range of initiatives, activities and expertise into targeted and multi-agency interventions that would make better use of resources and provide a strategic approach to public health nutrition.



Anne Pridgeon, the Fit for the Future Food Co-ordinator in Barnsley employed by a partnership across the PCT, local authority and voluntary/community sector has a role to include providing a strategic and co-ordinated approach to food work across the borough, raising the profile of locally produced food and making new links between healthy foods and the local economy. This role has involved setting up and project managing the Barnsley Food Network with an aim to strengthen links between local food projects, local producers and businesses and Barnsley PCT local food pilot that has introduced local produce into the menus for patients, staff and visitors at three of the PCT sites.

Carol Weir is a dietitian working as a Public Health Specialist. She was nominated and represented the BDA as a member the School Meals Review Panel which developed the DFES Turning the Tables (2005), report on new nutritional standards for school meals.



Sue Lloyd, Specialist Public Health Dietitian and Nutrition Advisor at the Wales Centre for Health designed, planned and developed the Nutrition Network for Wales which has included developing a website and face-to-face communications to support the network.

Luci Daniels is a self-employed dietitian who has tendered for Food Standards Agency contracts. One contract was to develop sample menus for care homes as part of the FSA work in developing nutrient standards in public institutions. The work involved devising a weekly menu, with full nutrient analysis and recipe analysis to meet 16 agreed nutrient targets, with data per day and per meal occasion.

Another contract was to be the moderator in a live webchat at Sugar magazine. This webchat was sponsored by the FSA as part of the BDA weight wise campaign, discussing a range of general nutrition issues on behalf of the FSA.

Appendix I

Key Health Policies

England

- 1 Department of Health, 2000, The NHS Plan: A plan for Investment a plan for reform.
- 2 Department of Health, 2002, Meeting the Challenge: a strategy for the Allied Health Professions.
- 3 Department of Health, November 2004, Choosing Health: Making Healthy Choices Easier.
- 4 Department of Health, March 2005, Choosing a Better Diet: a food and health action plan.
- 5 Department of Health, March 2005, Choosing Activity: a physical activity action plan.
- 6 Department of Health, March 2005, Delivering Choosing Health: Making Healthier Choices easier.
- 7 Wanless, D, 2002, Securing our Future Health: Taking a Long Term View. Final Report. London: HM Treasury.

Northern Ireland

- 8 Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety; A Healthier Future: A Twenty Year Vision for Health and Wellbeing in Northern Ireland (2005-2025).
- 9 Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, March 2002, Investing for Health.
- 10 Fit Futures Focus on Food Activity and Young People, January 2006.

Scotland

- 11 The Scottish Executive, 2005, Delivering for Health.
- 12 The Scottish Executive, 2002, Building on Success: Future Directions for the Allied Health Professions in Scotland.
- 13 The Scottish Executive, 1999, 'Towards a healthier Scotland' - A White Paper on Health.
- 14 Scottish Executive, 2003, Improving Health in Scotland: The Challenge.
- 15 The Scottish Office, 1996, Eating for Health: A Diet Action Plan for Scotland.
- 16 The Scottish Executive, 2004, Eating for Health: Meeting the Challenge, Co-ordinated Action, Improve communication and leadership for Scottish Food and Health Policy.
- 17 Food Standards Agency Scotland: Food Standards Agency Scotland's Diet and Nutrition Strategy: our role in implementing the Scottish Diet Action Plan (2003-2006).

Wales

- 18 Welsh Assembly Government, May 2005, Designed for Life: Creating World Class Health and Social Care in Wales in the 21st Century.
- 19 Welsh Assembly Government, May 1998, Better Health - Better Wales.
- 20 Welsh Assembly Government, 2001, Promoting Health and well being: Implementing the National Health Promotion Strategy.
- 21 Welsh Assembly Government, 2002, Well Being in Wales.
- 22 Health Challenge Wales.
- 23 Welsh Assembly Government, November 2006, a Therapy Strategy for Wales, The Contribution of Therapy Services to Transforming the Delivery of Health and Social Care in Wales, Therapies for Modernisation.
- 24 Food Standards Agency Wales, 2003, Food and Wellbeing: Reducing inequalities through a nutrition strategy for Wales.

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