

BDA Support Workforce Case Study

Claire Abbott

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Tell us about your NHS role and the difference it makes to patient care:

As an Oncology Dietetic Assistant, I run clinics alongside the oncology dietitians and independently provide support for patients and their carers.

Nutrition and feeding induces an emotional response in families, who are keen to nurture their loved ones as nutritional needs change. Appropriate support and empathy at this difficult time is vital, it helps patients and carers to manage their expectations. My role is to listen and hear what is being said and a lot of the time what is not being said. Since the COVID pandemic a lot of our communication with patients is now over the phone. This has made it harder to build rapport and read non-verbal cues. With this in mind I try and visit patients on the chemotherapy unit to touch base.

Another aspect of the role is the administrative support I provide to the team. This varies from telephone, to emails, to sorting clinics, ordering nutritional supplements and most importantly making sure that the team eat lunch! Supporting the dietitians in the team who provide multifaceted advice to patients with complex disease, is both rewarding and educational.

I am lucky enough to work in a forward-thinking department that constantly thinks 'what can we do next, what can we do differently'.

Tell us about the award you were nominated and shortlisted for

I was nominated for the National AHP Support Worker award in the category of "Supporting Our People" shortlisted for the South East region.

Tell us about the reason you were nominated for the award, and who were you nominated by

This is an extract from my award nomination which was made by Nicola Porter and Lindsey Allan, Macmillan Oncology dietitians working in my team.

"Claire joined the Department of Nutrition and Dietetics at the Royal Surrey County Hospital 5 years ago into our newly created post of Band 3 Macmillan Oncology Dietetic Assistant. In that time, she has become an invaluable part of the team. She established this new role with enthusiasm and a keen desire to learn and has completely exceeded all



Presented by Health Education England at the Celebrating Inspirational AHP Support Workforce Webinar in December 2022.

of our expectations. Claire has demonstrated the huge value of this role and the department now has a total of 3 dietetic assistants.

"We miss Claire (and her laughter) when she is away from the office and genuinely feel that she is the central cog of our team. Without her, our work and wellbeing would suffer, and our patients would be deprived of her amazing input. Her natural person-centred care, for both her patients and her peers, demonstrates respect, kindness and compassion."

What would you say to others to encourage more people to join the NHS Dietetic Support Workforce

When I started working as an Oncology DA I used to wish that I had trained as a dietitian, but I now believe that the role is unique in its own right.

From my perspective, having a grown-up family, the role has allowed me to return to working in hospitals, which I love, having trained originally as a nurse.

The DA role would suit all ages and backgrounds, and is perfect for anyone wanting to work in a hospital or community setting and who is keen to make a difference to patients and their carers. It provides an interesting insight into the role of the dietitian in a clinical environment not just in Oncology but many other specialities, e.g., gastroenterology, diabetes, head and neck cancer.

The role can grow with the individual. It's interesting, stimulating and immensely rewarding, and probably not what you think but in a good way!! It will also most definitely not involve eating salads day in day out!

Anything else you would like to say about your role, or being a member of the dietetic support workforce?

As challenges in the NHS increase, increasing roles such as the Dietetic Support Worker will become an integral part in service development.

