

Darren Sills - Lead Specialist
Cystic Fibrosis Dietitian

Careers in Dietetics:

Lead Specialist Cystic Fibrosis Dietitian

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

I am the lead Dietitian in a large multi-disciplinary team working with adults with cystic fibrosis. I ensure we are working with up-to-date evidence to provide the best nutritional care possible, this may be providing individual advice for patients, writing or updating guidelines or supporting other team members.

What does a day in the life of your role look like?

I usually have a clinic in a morning. Clinics start with a discussion about people attending, the consultant, a cystic fibrosis specialist nurse, physiotherapist, social worker, psychologist and of course the Dietitian discuss issues around the persons health and care, and plan how we will approach clinic that day.

We usually have a couple of annual assessments – these are through reviews of a patients progress throughout the past year and aims and goals for the next year. Within an annual assessment, we look at nutritional status and trends, including using bioimpedance analysis and handgrip dynamometry. We review biochemistry including fat-soluble vitamins, measures of blood glucose control, cholesterol, bone markers. We check bone density scans, assess risk

factors for bone loss and provide diet and lifestyle advice to optimise bone health. Where these simple changes haven't worked, we will discuss with the team and decide if medications are needed. We take a history of medications used, paying attention to gut related drugs, such as acid suppressants, laxatives and pancreatic enzymes. We then assess diet intake alongside pancreatic enzyme use, blood glucose control and insulin use, oral supplements and enteral feeds where used. Finally, we are able to round up all this information and encourage the person to come up with some goals for the year. Goals maybe removing a feeding tube, support to be well for travelling or having children and maybe even some skills to support moving away from parents.

After clinic we may have whole team meeting, we have a monthly plan to discuss topics such as; complex patient care, education sessions, promote projects being completed and senior management group meetings.





I then have some after clinic administration work including recording data on people I have seen, completing clinic follow up tasks or contacting patients from previous clinics or those who may have left messages. Any spare time might be used completing projects, reading the latest journal articles on cystic fibrosis or creating patient resources through leaflets or social media posts.

Why do you love working in the NHS?

Dietetics promote evidence based practice, the NHS is becoming so much more focussed on being able to answer questions that are important to improve patient care.

I love the opportunity to improve practice and care for patients.

What attracted you to being a Specialist Cystic Fibrosis Dietitian?

I was attracted by the enthusiasm shown by a colleague working in cystic fibrosis. When a post became vacant, I thought I could just give it a go!

What kept me was the amazing teamwork (I include people with cystic fibrosis in this), the variety of skills needed, the opportunity to develop care and constantly improve. Variety is the spice of life and nothing is ever the same in cystic fibrosis!

Can you tell us a bit about your educational background? What education route did you take, and why? What are your qualifications.

I left school interested in becoming a sports coach, but during my Sports Science degree I become more interested in nutrition and then in the care of people who nutrition can help get better.

My dietetic training was a two-year post-graduate diploma in Leeds.

Did you undertake any work experience before applying for the role? Can you suggest any work experience that may help entering this specialism?

Being interested in audits, service evaluation and research is a must too. If you like being a specialist generalist, cystic fibrosis is for you!

How has training and development in your role helped you so far?

It's highlighted that communication is key. Being able to express your thoughts to other team members, elicit information from people with cystic fibrosis and provide advice at the correct level for those receiving is vital.

On a non-clinical basis post-graduate training focus on appraising evidence is so important. Training has helped me to develop clinically relevant research questions, systematically search the literature and appraise the quality and how this might be integrated into practice.

What are you most proud of in your role?

Being able to look at the service we provide and shape it based on what people need.

What would you say to others to encourage more people to become NHS Dietitians in your Specialism

If you enjoy team working and seeing people grow and develop then cystic fibrosis is for you.



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