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My route into Older Adult's Mental Health

There has been a void in the provision of dietetics in mental health within the trust for many years.

During my time within the eating disorders services, I was approached by service leaders within inpatient adults and older people's mental health, to ask if this is a role I would be interested in pursuing. Although I have a passion for working in eating disorders, I knew that by extending my scope of practice across mental health, this would enable me to provide a variety of care to a diverse range of patients, I always enjoyed the variety of my work within community dietetics, and this role enables me to have the best of both worlds, whilst still seeing patients with eating disorders who are inpatients within mental health settings or under the care of the community mental health teams. I also get to cover the Forensic unit, which is really interesting.

I have attended advanced courses in eating disorders, mental health, and I am a member of the Mental Health BDA Group, attending meetings frequently. I have completed a post graduate certificate in Systemic Therapy, and also attended training around Family Therapy, as well as ARC training for trauma informed practice and Acceptance and Commitment Therapy Training (ACT) and behaviour change. I am hoping to complete the non-medical prescribing course this year, which will allow me to work more autonomously, and will improve patient care.

A typical day in my role

I work full time across a range of areas.

Mondays – Adults Eating Disorders

Tues, Weds, Fri– Adults and Older Peoples Mental Health inpatients

Thurs – Forensics

My usual activities involve assessing and reviewing patients either 1-1 or reviewing as part of an MDT. I also attend MDT and service development meetings (such a Nutrition and Hydration steering groups and Clinical Networking meetings), provide training and updates to staff members, attend group and individual supervision sessions, work alongside Medics, Pharmacists, Psychiatrists, Psychologists, Mental Health nurses, Clinical Leads, Physios, OT's, SALT and HCA's. I also participate in the training of students.

What are you most proud of within your role?

As there has not been any dietetic input within this area, I was proud to not only be approached for this role, but also to have the scope to implement this from scratch. Although I have only been in the role for a short time, I am already in the process of adapting processes to improve patient care. One of these projects involves the improvement of nutritional screening in Mental Health, and the introduction of the St Andrew's Nutritional Screening Instrument, which is a tool designed to be used across mental health settings and captures risks that MUST may not identify, such as obesity, swallowing difficulties, and eating disorders.

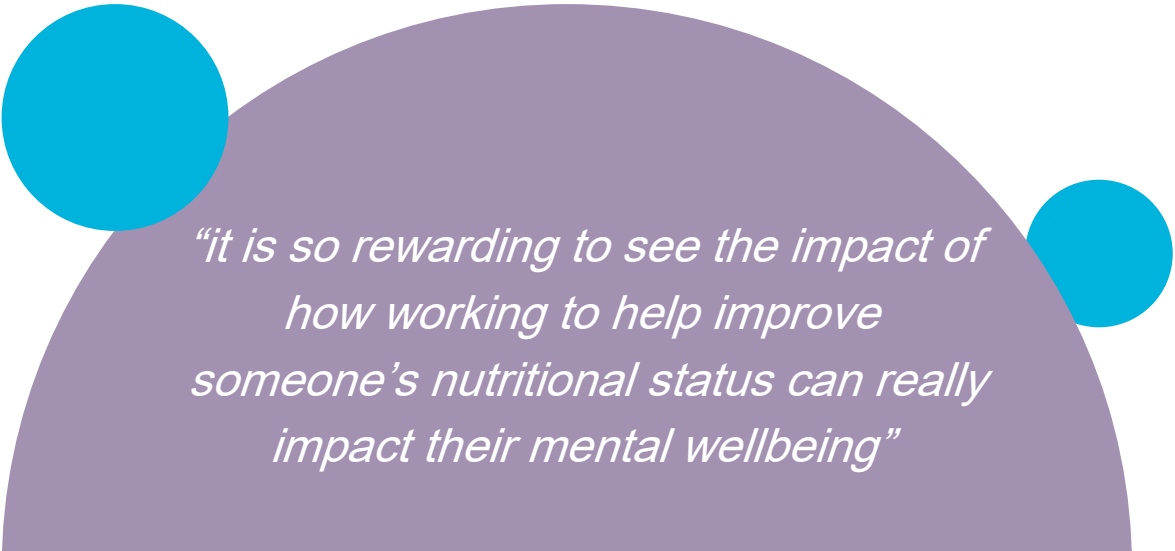
When considering patient success, I have supported patients who have been acutely mentally unwell and have been severely malnourished and worked with them to improve their nutritional intake and worked alongside other healthcare professionals to see them make a full recovery and be discharged home. Due to my experience with Tier 3 weight management, I have contributed and lead on parts of developing a tier 3 service with the Forensic service, and this is something that is currently in progress.

What advice would you offer to someone considering a role in your specialism?

Try not to be put off by the role due to the mental health aspects. Although this can be challenging at times, it is so rewarding to see the impact of how working to help improve someone's nutritional status can really impact their mental wellbeing.

Looking at additional training in behaviour change, motivational interviewing, and also understanding the Mental Health Act can be really beneficial, and this is something I am still always learning about, as well as the impact of some medications.

The BDA has a great range of resources available in their Mental Health Groups and subgroups and linking up with other mental health dietitians in the region is also a great way of sharing knowledge, updates and experiences, as well as providing group supervision.



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How I want my future to look

I would love to see the role of the Dietitian within Mental Health continue to grow, and I would like to one day see a team of dietitians, and dietetic practitioners working alongside each other. I would like to continue to develop my holistic approach to care and complete my non-medical prescribing course. I would also like to increase my skills in diabetes, particularly insulin management, and will be attending DAFNE to allow me to gain more insight. I am attending the BDA diabetes course this year as well as the National Eating Disorders Conference and will also be attending a course in interpreting blood results in dietetics and eating disorders.

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