Prescribing Support Dietitians work predominantly with GP practices and Medicines Management Teams in Clinical Commissioning Groups to help improve effective and appropriate prescribing of nutritional products (products approved by the Advisory Committee on Borderline Substances).

A large part of the work of Prescribing Support Dietitians involves identifying and managing malnutrition through a “food first” approach and ensuring appropriate prescribing of oral nutritional supplements. This may involve assessing individual patients to update their nutritional care plan as well as working with carers, care homes and community services to provide training for staff on identification of malnutrition using nutritional screening and appropriate management with a food first approach and appropriate use of oral nutritional supplements (ONS).

Specialist Dietitians in Appropriate Prescribing of Nutritional Products in Primary Care

Dietitians:

- Are uniquely trained to provide the latest evidence based information and advice to service users across the whole health economy, in identifying and managing malnutrition, including the appropriate use of oral nutritional supplements
- Work with patients and their carers to reduce the risk of malnutrition and promote a food first approach to nutrition support in the community
- Ensure cost effective and appropriate prescribing of nutritional products and reduce unnecessary wastage of these products
- Provide training on nutritional screening, identifying nutritional risk and putting appropriate interventions in place. This improves patient outcomes in a cost effective way by reducing the complications of malnutrition
- Develop local policies and guidelines for GPs to ensure that the right people get the right products prescribed at the right time
- Support GPs with appropriate prescribing of other nutritional products such as gluten free foods and specialist infant formulae
- Play a major role in educating a range of other health professionals to enable them to make appropriate decisions about the use of prescribed nutritional products such as oral nutritional supplements.
What is the size of the problem?
It is widely reported that up to 3 million adults in the UK are malnourished with the cost of treating malnutrition estimated to be £13 billion. (1) Data from audits carried out in primary care organisations indicate that up to 75% of adult prescriptions for oral nutritional supplements were not appropriate based on the Advisory Committee for Borderline Substances prescribing criteria and dietetic judgement. (2)

Case Study
Mrs X was admitted to a care home from hospital. She had a recent stroke and was having ONS prescribed 4 times per day. The ONS had been started while she was in hospital, but there was no planned review following discharge. Her weight on admission to the care home was 57.9kg, BMI 23.8kg/m2. The dietetic plan agreed was to stop ONS, replacing it with 2 full fat yoghurts per day and fortified food. Over the next few months, she was generally eating well, and on most occasions eating all meals, having fortified food and snacks between meals. Her weight after 8 months was 60.7kg, BMI 24.9kg/m2.

This case study shows that the dietetic involvement resulted in inappropriate ONS prescriptions being stopped following assessment by a dietitian. The patient continued to gain weight and maintained good health while having normal diet and fortified food. In addition to the improvement in this lady’s health, stopping inappropriate ONS resulted in a projected annual saving to the CCG’s prescribing budget of £2600.

References

Success story from South West Essex
The prescribing support dietitian in South West Essex identified from local audits that prescribing of specialist infant formulae was sometimes inappropriate and unsafe. GPs confirmed that they had limited knowledge of which products to prescribe and were often unsure when to refer to other colleagues. Health visitors also reported being out of date with product knowledge. Guidelines were developed and training provided for a range of staff. Post-implementation of the guidelines, data has shown that prescribing of infant formula is now more appropriate and safe.

These guidelines have had a positive impact on patients and families. Dietitians have seen an increase in referral rates, they report that the GPs are now planning referrals more effectively to ensure that weaning advice can be offered at the appropriate time, meaning that infants can continue to be safe and symptoms managed as food is introduced. The guidelines have now been shared with several other organisations across the country.

“My prescribing support role allows me to liaise and communicate with a variety of services. For example, I was able to offer a cystic fibrosis patient on oral nutritional supplements a dietetic review at a time and place that suited her, as she couldn’t attend appointments at the specialist centre and so had not had any dietetic support for several years. She was very grateful for the support and is now doing well on an individualised plan, which has been shared with the services caring for her.”

Vittoria Romano,
Prescribing Support Dietitian, Bedfordshire

The British Dietetic Association, founded in 1936, is the professional association for dietitians in Great Britain and Northern Ireland. It is the nation’s largest organisation of food and nutrition professionals with over 8,000 members. The BDA is also an active trade union. To find out more about other areas of work that dietitians are involved in please visit:

www.bda.uk.com

Try our:
Food Fact Sheets: these give information about foods and also about medical conditions - available on the website.

Why not follow the BDA:
@BrDieteticAssoc
BritishDieteticAssociation