



## Specialist Dietitians in Public Health

**It is essential that those providing support and education about nutrition to NHS Local Health Boards and Trusts, local authorities, partner organisations and the public give consistent, evidence based information. Dietitians have unique training and experience to enable them to do this.**

### Role of the Public Health Dietitian in Wales

In Wales, most Public Health Dietitians work within the NHS. Nutrition programmes are co-produced alongside health and social care, third sector organisations and communities to improve the health and wellbeing of the population<sup>1</sup>. Public Health Dietitians in Wales may also work within local authority projects and programmes, national government departments or in private practice.

Public Health Dietitians use their knowledge and expertise to develop evidence based messages and recommendations which promote healthy food and drink consumption. Public Health Dietitians can support organisations and the public in many settings to ensure consistent messages about food and diet are promoted.

**Nutrition Skills for Life™** is an established, multi award\* winning programme co-ordinated by NHS Public Health Dietitians in Wales. It provides accredited nutrition skills training for community workers/volunteers and peer leaders and supports the development of community food initiatives. The main aim of the programme is to build the capacity of communities to support healthy eating and prevent malnutrition through enabling and empowering community based staff to cascade appropriate nutrition practices through their work.

\*Winner of AHP & HS Award 2009; NHS Wales Award 2014; UK Bevan Prize 2014; Public Health Wales Good Practice Award 2014; UK Advancing Healthcare Award for AHP support worker 2016; Finalist RSPH Award 2017.

### Obesity

59% or 3 in 5 adults in Wales are overweight (BMI of 25+) or obese (BMI of 30+) <sup>2</sup>. Prevalence continues to increase and it is estimated that two thirds of the adult population in Wales will be overweight or obese by 2025<sup>3</sup>. It is estimated that obesity costs the wider economy £27 billion.<sup>4</sup>

### Malnutrition

Malnutrition affects over 3 million people in the UK. 28% of patients admitted to hospital in Wales are malnourished<sup>5</sup>. The cost of malnutrition in Wales is estimated to be more than £1.4 billion per annum.<sup>6</sup>

### Costs of a poor diet

Wales has the highest rate of chronic conditions in the UK<sup>7</sup> and increasing prevalence is a major cause of rising costs to NHS Wales<sup>8</sup>. Diet is a key factor in the prevention of many chronic conditions such as Cardiovascular Disease, type 2 diabetes and some cancers. It is central to the prevention of obesity and malnutrition (or "undernutrition") and to improve and maintain physical and mental health and wellbeing.

### Confusion regarding the effects of food on health

The media frequently publishes confusing and contradictory stories about diet.

- Exposure to contradictory health information can lead to a disinclination to take on well-established, evidence based health messages regarding food<sup>9</sup>.
- Journalists, researchers, university press officers and scientific journals need to work together more closely to ensure clear, consistent nutrition messages are communicated to the public in an engaging way<sup>10</sup>.

Public Health Dietitians in Wales are key to developing national policy and standards, planning services and managing interventions that address inequalities and impact on the prevention of a range of chronic conditions thereby reducing the burden on the NHS. This supports the Welsh Government's long term vision is of a 'whole system approach to health and social care' which focuses on wellbeing, prevention and early intervention<sup>11</sup>.

## Interventions include the following:

### Research

**Leading research into local food needs. Describing the evidence base regarding food related illness and prevention.**

### Education

**Building capacity within communities to support healthy eating. Facilitating accredited nutrition training for health, social care and third sector workers to ensure that nutrition information given to the public is evidence based and reliable. Facilitating group sessions for members of the public to promote health and wellbeing and support the development of community food initiatives.**

**Supporting or leading on projects and programmes delivered over a period of time to support communities. This includes working in partnership with other all Wales programmes such as Flying Start and Families First to improve access to affordable, healthy and sustainable food e.g. in schools and community groups. Providing printed and web based information.**

### Environment

**Advising local authorities on food issues relating to health e.g. planning law and restricting the number of fast food outlets, sustainable and affordable food<sup>12</sup>.**

**Ensuring that the healthy choice is the easy choice by supporting food outlets to provide healthy food and drink options. This includes commercial food providers as well as pre schools, schools, youth, leisure and community settings, staff dining rooms and organisations participating in the Healthy Working Wales Corporate Health Standard and Small Workplace Health Award<sup>13</sup>.**

**Advising on practical approaches that lower environmental impact<sup>14</sup>.**

### Empowerment

**Delivering training and helping people to develop the skills they need to be able to provide healthy food for themselves and their families. Working in partnership to develop community centred projects to meet community needs<sup>15</sup>.**

#### References

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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](http://www.bda.uk.com)

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