

# **What is dietary counselling? Developing an international consensus on best practices in dietary counselling interventions in malnutrition research.**

## **INTRODUCTION**

### What is the problem?

Currently there is a lack of consensus on the terms used to define and describe dietary counselling for oral nutritional interventions frequently used in the management of malnutrition in research studies. Inconsistencies relate not only to intervention terminology (e.g. dietary advice, dietary counselling, oral nutritional support), but also to the essential components of the care process that are considered part of the intervention being evaluated (e.g. assessment, care planning, monitoring and evaluation), who delivers them (e.g. dietitian, nurse, physician), the qualifications and experience required for effective delivery, and how they are delivered (e.g. mode of delivery, frequency and number of follow-up contacts).

As a result of these inconsistencies, it has been impossible to fully evaluate interventions that benefit from individualized dietary counselling to determine those that are most effective in people who have been identified as at risk of malnutrition or malnourished. This has led to conflicting evidence that results in scepticism on the value of these nutritional interventions. Since it is possible there may be variation in the effectiveness of different interventions according to clinical condition, care setting, the discipline of the health professionals and clinical experience of the nutrition care team, or the duration and intensity of the intervention, it is essential that the interventions themselves are described as consistently and fully as possible when conducting research in this area. This work has been focused on creating this consistency.

Consensus on the definitions, nature and content of different types of nutritional interventions that include dietetic counselling will:

- assist clinical researchers to design RCTs to explore the relative benefits of different oral nutritional interventions that include dietary counselling,
- assist systematic reviewers to fully evaluate the impact of different nutritional interventions on patient-centred, functional, and clinical outcomes, as well as cost effectiveness,
- control the type of nutrition intervention to allow examination of other predictive variables such as clinical condition, composition of nutrition support teams, care setting, family care networks, intensity of intervention, and training and experience of staff

In late 2019, an international team of dietitians was convened to undertake an adapted Delphi process to achieve the following aims.

- To establish international consensus on the definition of terms used to describe interventions that include dietary counselling for the management of disease-related malnutrition

- To establish international consensus on the nature and content of interventions that include dietary counselling in the management of disease-related malnutrition

The aims of the workshop are to present the team and work conducted to date and to explore how best to validate the results of the consensus project. The programme for the 50 minute session is detailed below.

- Introduction and origins of the project (Dr Elizabeth Weekes, London, UK) (15 minutes)
- Definitions, scoping and the Delphi process (Dr Alison Steiber, USA) (10 minutes)
- Next steps - engaging for validation (Prof Heather Keller, Canada) (15 minutes)
- Questions from the delegates (facilitated by workshop speakers) (10 minutes)

### **Speakers**

Dr Elizabeth Weekes, Consultant Dietitian, Guy's & St Thomas' NHS Foundation Trust and Senior Clinical Lecturer, University College London Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, London, UK

Dr Alison Steiber, Chief Science Officer, Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, Cleveland, Ohio, USA

Prof Heather Keller, Professor, and Research Chair, Nutrition and Ageing, University of Waterloo, Ontario, Canada