



Help the
Hospices



Professional Consensus Statement of nutritional care in palliative care patients

Produced by: Food & Nutrition Group

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Date: September 2009



Introduction

This professional Consensus Statement has been developed for health and social care professionals involved in the nutritional care of people with palliative care needs.

Many of these people will become malnourished due to the progressive nature of their illness.

The consensus has been developed due to the limited evidence base for appropriate nutritional management of people with palliative care needs.

Need for Consensus Statement

In 2007 the Food and Nutrition Group at Help the Hospices undertook a survey to investigate various aspects of nutrition with the aim of gaining a better understanding of the key issues in this area. It was found that most hospices did not have a nutrition group or nutrition policy and although a combination of different health professionals offered nutritional advice the majority did not provide teaching on nutritional issues. A further survey in 2009 highlighted the lack of use of nutritional screening and Nutritional Assessment Tools.

The Food and Nutrition Group discussed the need for guidance to support health and social care professionals due to the increasing demand for hospices to manage nutritional issues appropriately. It was acknowledged that advice and support given to patients varies widely based on individual opinions and their 'clinical judgement' on the management of nutrition. Hospices are also beginning to set up Nutritional Steering Groups and undertaking Nutrition Audits based on the *Essence of Care: Patient-focused benchmarking for healthcare practitioners* (February 2001).

In addition, it was noted that most hospices and primary care organisations have limited or no access to dietitians who work in palliative care to be able to obtain expert dietary advice and support, teaching and training.

Benefits of the Consensus Statement

To guide and promote consistency in nutritional advice given to palliative care patients.

To promote the role of a multidisciplinary and holistic approach to the nutritional management and care of this client group.

To improve the quality of nutritional care given.

Consensus Statement

For the purpose of this Consensus Statement nutritional care is defined as 'providing food and fluids, and nutritional supplements where appropriate, to meet the needs and choices of individuals throughout their care pathway'.

1. Nutritional care is an essential aspect of palliative care for patients and their carers.
2. The nutritional needs of all palliative care patients should be identified and an appropriate care plan implemented
3. Nutritional care for people with palliative care needs should be individualised according to the patients' disease and the stage they are along their illness.
4. Nutritional care should be delivered safely and with compassion and dignity.
5. Nutritional needs may change for people at the end of life. Nutritional screening may not be appropriate at this stage. Maintaining optimal quality-of-life rather than optimising nutritional intake, at this stage, can be seen as the primary goal of nutritional intervention.
6. Nutritional care can have physical, social, cultural and emotional aspects.
7. Nutritional care is a matter for all palliative care professionals. All staff and volunteers should have the appropriate skills and competencies needed to ensure that the nutritional needs of people using palliative care services are met.
8. All staff and volunteers should receive regular training to update knowledge on nutritional care and management.
9. Healthcare organisations are responsible for delivering nutritional care, which should be inclusive of not only the individual with palliative care needs, but also their families and their carers to whom relevant information, advice and support should be given.
10. Organisations should ensure access to all relevant services to support the nutritional needs of people with palliative care needs, including suitable and accurate equipment to screen and assess nutritional needs.

Membership of the Food and Nutrition Group

The group has multiprofessional representation from palliative care doctors, nurses, a researcher/ academic, dietitians, physiotherapist, chefs, caterers, social workers and service users. It has representatives from National Patient Safety Agency (NPSA), Royal College of Nursing (RCN), British Association of Parenteral and Enteral Nutrition (BAPEN), Association of Palliative Care Social Workers and National Association of Care Catering (NACC). The group meets every three months.

Produced: September 2009

Review date: September 2010

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