Every health care contact is a health improvement opportunity

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‘When referred to a dietitian, an individual may have a clinical need to change their dietary habits in order to improve their health; however, it is often the case that other health issues, such as exercise, smoking and alcohol are also discussed. By working collaboratively as part of a multi-agency team I can refer onto other supportive services when required.’

‘Dietitians are highly skilled in motivational interviewing and communication skills so that they can empower and support individuals to recognise the need for change.’

Frontline Profile: Dietetics and Health Improvement

Susan Short is a State Registered Dietitian currently on secondment to Maternity Services at Wishaw General Hospital in Lanarkshire. Her role involves working with a midwife and physiotherapist on a variety of projects to improve maternal health, including maternal obesity. Susan’s specialist area is weight management and she has worked as a dietitian for 15 years.

Dietetics and health improvement

Regardless of their role or area of speciality, all dietitians are involved in health improvement – there is always an aspect of supporting dietary change to promote wellbeing and prevent ill health. Clinically, dietitians encourage health improvement with an individual or group via the promotion of dietary, lifestyle and behaviour change.

In a wider sense, as skilled communicators and experts in nutrition, dietitians may be involved in education and training of other health professionals or can work in public health developing guidelines or public information.

Integrating health improvement into practice

Encouraging the public to change their lifestyle is not easy when habits are deep rooted and attitudes and beliefs are long standing.

In the last year I have been seconded to work with a midwife on a variety of projects to improve maternal health through the development of a nutritional screening tool for use with pregnant women, a resource pack for midwives and other health professionals and a care pathway for management of obese women in pregnancy. We are also working with a physiotherapist to investigate exercise opportunities for obese pregnant women in both the acute and community setting.

Seizing the opportunity

The public can often become confused by the ‘quick fix’ solutions offered in the media, and when other health professionals provide nutritional advice that is out of date. This is why it is important, as dietitians, to share our knowledge and work together across the NHS.

In my current role I am training midwives to ensure health messages are consistent and evidence-based. When a health professional is over- or underweight themselves, this has also been raised as a problem, in that they find it difficult to discuss weight with their patients.
KSF evidence

This profile demonstrates how the dietetic professional can extend their involvement in promoting health improvement by using and sharing their specific skills and knowledge within a multidisciplinary team to improve the provision of health improvement support for both patients and staff. This section of the profile provides examples of practice within this context that might be provided by a dietetic professional as evidence, towards meeting the requirements of the post holder’s KSF post outline.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Evidence from practice</th>
<th>Indicative dimensions</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Developed, in conjunction with a physiotherapy colleague, a resource pack for other professionals identifying the exercise opportunities for patients in an acute setting.</td>
<td>Core 1 Core 2 Core 4 Core 5 HWB 1</td>
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<td>Supported midwives to improve their effectiveness in discussing healthy weight issues with mothers, by providing information and support in the workplace for these staff to improve their own health.</td>
<td>Core 2 Core 4 Core 5 HWB 1 HWB 4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Contributed to development of evidence-based resources and a care pathway to support midwives and other professionals in managing care for obese women in pregnancy.</td>
<td>Core 2 Core 4 Core 5 Core 6 HWB 1</td>
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<td>Adapted healthy eating literature to take account of cultural dietary issues and used this as a learning resource for other professionals within the team.</td>
<td>Core 1 Core 2 Core 4 Core 5 Core 6</td>
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