

Food, Fluid and Nutritional Care in Hospitals

A short guide to our findings

© NHS Quality Improvement Scotland 2006

First published August 2006

You can copy or reproduce the information in this document for use within NHSScotland and for educational purposes. You must not make a profit using information in this document. Commercial organisations must get our written permission before reproducing this document.

www.nhshealthquality.org

Food, Fluid and Nutritional Care in Hospitals

A short guide to our findings

Background

Nutritional care is not simply a question of food and drink. It is a question of assessing and responding to individual patients' needs as part of their overall care and treatment.

In Scotland, both the Scottish Executive Health Department (SEHD) and NHSScotland have long recognised the importance of this and responded by publishing a report called 'Scotland's Health: A Challenge to Us All, Eating for Health – A Diet Action Plan for Scotland'.

This report included recommendations that NHS Quality Improvement Scotland (NHS QIS) develop a set of national standards on how NHSScotland provides food, fluid and nutritional care in hospitals. We published these national standards in 2003.

Following on from the publication of these standards, we published a report detailing the performance of NHS boards against these standards, called 'Food, Fluid and Nutritional Care in Hospitals'. This booklet is a summary of our findings.

The standards

We visited each NHS board area in Scotland and two special health boards. We assessed their performance against three of the six national standards that we had set, each one with a number of criteria:

- **Standard 1** looks at the policies and strategies that NHS boards need to have in place to make sure that high quality nutritional care is provided.
- **Standard 2** covers the assessment of each patient's nutritional status and requires that a care plan is put in place.
- **Standard 6** is about the education and training on nutritional care provided to NHSScotland staff.

The standards were developed in wide consultation with healthcare professionals, and most importantly, with those who use the services and their carers.

Full details of the standards and how your NHS board is performing are available on request or by visiting our website at www.nhshealthquality.org

Standard 1

Policy and strategy

This standard focuses on the arrangements that NHS boards need to have in place to make sure that high quality nutritional care is provided.

It emphasises that the leaders of NHS boards must ensure that there is the same commitment to nutritional care as any other area of clinical care.

Also, NHS boards must make sure that planning of nutritional services is thorough for all patients, including those with complex nutritional needs.

The standard requires that each NHS board has a policy and a strategic plan to ensure the provision of food and fluid, and to improve the quality of nutritional care.

We found:

- all NHS boards are making progress with developing a nutritional care policy.
- in the majority of NHS boards, the policy and strategic plan are still in draft form;
- NHS boards have started to carry out formal risk assessments on their policy and plan; and
- specific budgets to support the development of nutritional care need to be established.

The standard requires that each NHS board area has at least one operational nutritional care group responsible to the NHS board for overseeing the implementation of the national standards and the NHS board's strategic plan.

We found:

- every NHS board has a nutritional care group; and
- some nutritional care groups need to extend their membership to include medical representation and lay representation.

The standard requires that where complex nutritional techniques are employed, the patient has access to the services of a clinical nutritional support team.

We found:

- some NHS boards have clinical nutritional support teams. These need to be extended to include a broader membership, in particular, a specialist nutrition nurse;
- of the NHS boards that have a team, some do not ensure they are accessible to all patients; and
- NHS boards that do not have clinical nutritional support teams, are able to access complex nutritional techniques and expertise as required from other NHS board areas.

Standard 2

Assessment, screening and care planning

This standard focuses on nutritional assessment, screening and care planning.

It aims to ensure that nutritional requirements are assessed in everyone admitted to hospital and that a care plan is put in place to meet their needs.

The standard requires that a medical/nursing assessment be carried out on the first day of the patient's stay.

We found that:

- there is evidence of thoughtful and careful nutritional care practice by operational staff; and
- a small number of NHS boards record all of the required nutritional information within 1 day for the majority of patients.

The standard requires that screening covers undernutrition, using an appropriate screening tool; that repeat screenings are undertaken where appropriate; and that the screening results are in the medical notes.

We found that:

- NHS boards have started to ensure that validated screening tools are in use where appropriate; and
- the results of screening are not always readily available to staff who require this information.

The standard requires that any need for referral to specialist services is identified, and that patients have access to these services within agreed timescales.

We found that:

- most NHS boards have assessment processes for referral, and patients have access to these services; and
- in most areas, patients do not have access to the specialists out-of-hours or at the weekend.

The standard requires that a multidisciplinary care plan is followed, reviewed and refined, and that a discharge plan is developed.

We found that:

- NHS boards need to develop multidisciplinary care plans which include the required nutritional information for each patient;
- discharge documents need to include all information or arrangements for follow up; and
- discharge planning needs to routinely highlight patients that are at risk.

Standard 6

Education and training for staff

This standard focuses on education and training for NHS staff.

It aims to ensure that staff have the training and education they need to provide high quality nutritional care in three key areas:

- health and safety, and food hygiene;
- local procedures for meal ordering etc.; and
- and screening for risk of undernutrition to provide special diets and assistance when required.

The standard requires all staff should be aware of the importance of nutritional care and staff in contact with patients are aware of local protocols for ordering and delivering food/fluid, meal and snack times, and procedures for ordering missed meals.

We found that:

- staff demonstrated an awareness of the importance of nutritional care;
- most NHS boards cover nutrition care as part of induction, or are in the process of doing so; and
- all NHS boards have systems for informing staff of the local procedures for the provision of food and fluid.

The standard requires all staff in contact with patients' food and fluid receive training in health and safety issues and food hygiene.

We found that:

- NHS boards are meeting their statutory duty in health and safety, and in hygiene training;
- a training needs assessment has been carried out within some NHS boards and a number of others are planning to undertake this; and
- all NHS boards have in-house education and training.

The standard requires there is a programme of nutritional education for staff.

We found that:

- a variety of nutrition courses have been developed which are tailored to meet staff's needs;
- learning packs in nutritional care are offered by many NHS boards;
- there are ongoing difficulties in releasing staff to attend education and training; and
- many NHS boards do not have a co-ordinated and structured approach to the provision of nutrition education and training across their organisation.

Summary

Progress & Challenges

The importance of good nutritional care is understood across NHSScotland and we have the 'hearts and minds' in place to deliver against the national standards.

What we do not yet have is a co-ordinated approach and, as a result, we are not making the best use of the knowledge and resources that we currently have.

Nor are we getting the best outcome for patients, particularly for the increasing number of older people admitted to hospital, as well as for those with complex nutritional needs.

All NHS boards are clearly aware of the value of assessment, screening and care planning, but we have not harnessed our efforts, experience and approaches.

Nor have we yet convinced all individuals within the clinical team that nutrition is an important part of clinical care, rather than a 'hotel service' provided to inpatients.

Finally, all NHS boards are meeting health and safety requirements and clearly take this seriously. NHS boards are now beginning to include nutritional care in personal and professional development plans and the challenge is to fully engage medical staff to ensure that this is an essential part of clinical care.

Summary

Recommendations

To achieve the next level of performance against the standards for food, fluid and nutritional care **NHS boards** must develop an action plan that:

- implements assessment, screening and care planning by 2009
- reviews complex nutritional care provision by 2007
- includes nutritional care as part of the NHS Knowledge and Skills Framework and job plans for all staff
- ensures there is a means of reporting on progress to the board
- ensures budgets and resources are available
- demonstrates commitment to the concept of nutritional care as part of clinical care.

NHS QIS will support the development of local nutritional risk assessment, and an audit tool to evaluate local assessment, screening and care planning; review practice development opportunities for nursing and allied health professions staff; and consult on future review and support

The **Scottish Executive Health Department** should continue to promote the importance of nutritional care and **NHS Education for Scotland** should consider supporting the development of nutritional care skills and competencies for staff.

About NHS QIS

Established in 2003, the role of NHS Quality Improvement Scotland is to improve the quality of care and treatment delivered by the Health Service.

We do this by setting standards and monitoring performance, and by providing NHSScotland with advice, guidance and support on effective clinical practice and service improvements.

More information about our work is available on request or by visiting our website at www.nhshealthquality.org

Notes:

You can read and download this document from our website. We can also provide this information:

- by email
- in large print
- on audio tape or CD
- in Braille, and
- in community languages.

NHS Quality Improvement Scotland

Edinburgh Office
Elliott House
8-10 Hillside Crescent
Edinburgh EH7 5EA

Phone: 0131 623 4300
Textphone: 0131 623 4383

Glasgow Office
Delta House
50 West Nile Street
Glasgow G1 2NP

Phone: 0141 225 6999
Textphone: 0141 241 6316

Email: comments@nhshealthquality.org
Website: www.nhshealthquality.org