

Improving methods of assessment and dietary management of children with neurodisabilities - A National survey of current dietetic practice

Study start date: 2005

Funding: Chailey Fund, Nutricia Clinical Care

Research worker: Sarah Almond, Senior Paediatric Dietician, Chailey Heritage Clinical Services

It has been suspected that there is a degree of uncertainty amongst dietitians working with children with neurodisabilities and therefore that clinical practice may be variable from dietitian to dietitian throughout the UK.

The suspicion has arisen from an increase in attendance at clinical supervision forums, over subscription at conferences in this specialty and an increase in telephone queries to specialist centers from dietitians working elsewhere in the UK.

Secondly there are no randomised controlled trials in the area of nutrition for children with neurodisabilities and other research is very limited. This is because the importance of good nutrition for children with complex disabilities is a relatively new discovery and thus research has not yet been carried out.

Only one publication by Hartley and Thomas in 2003 has attempted to investigate this variability and revealed that indeed there was a disparity in dietetic practice and those dietitians with a large caseload and the support of a multidisciplinary nutrition team were likely to experiment with a wider variety of dietetic assessment techniques than those dietitians who looked after only a few children and worked alone. Thus there are inequalities in the nutritional care for children with complex disabilities which must be addressed.

The aim of this study is to conduct a survey amongst dietitians to ascertain exactly what their clinical current practice is. At the same time the available clinical research will be critically evaluated to produce evidence based guidelines. Where research is lacking an expert group of dietitians working within this specialty will advise on best practice guidance instead.

The results of the survey of dietitians practice will be compared against the guidelines produced to ascertain a level of concordance prior to the guidelines being launched.

The guidelines will then be published and made available free of charge. They will highly advertised across dietetic forums to promote their availability.

A second survey will then be carried out with the intention of reassessing dietitians practice to ascertain whether clinical practice has changed as a result of having evidence based guidelines to follow. The results of this will be published in an appropriate dietetic journal.

Progress to date

The first survey has been carried out and data analysis is underway to find out the exact degree of variability amongst dietitians clinical practice. The research literature has been critically appraised and decisions have been made for best practice where evidence is lacking in order to produce evidence based guidelines, however these have not yet been launched.

References

Hartley H, Thomas JE. Current practice in the management of children with CP: a national survey of paediatric dietitians. *J Hum Nutr Dietet.* 2003; **16**: 219-224

*Sarah Almond
Chailey Heritage Clinical Services
November 2006*