Evaluation of a care home in the Republic of Ireland on the staff’s decision-making process of nutrition support for its residents for the prevention and treatment of malnutrition. **Duggan, S. Parish, D.**

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**Background**

Malnutrition currently affects approximately 145,000 adults in the Republic of Ireland (IRSPEN, 2017). Malnutrition comes at a huge cost to the Health Service Executive (HSE) with healthcare costs estimated to be three times higher with malnourished patients (Rice, 2012). Future predictions propose that the cost to the HSE will continue to rise as a result of the ageing population in Ireland. It is estimated that by 2040, one in four Irish people will be over 65 in comparison to one in nine now (CSO, 2011).

Malnutrition prevention strategies in the community such as the care home setting may help to alleviate future burdens on the HSE and improve patient quality of life (NICE, CG32, 2006). Improved education and training on screening tools and malnutrition may have a role to play in malnutrition prevention, identification and treatment (Mowe et al, 2008).

Current evidence suggests having support from a dietitian may help to alleviate ONS wastage (De Paor, 2010) and have an effective impact on food first measures (NHS, 2018).

The aim of this study was to gain a greater insight into the decision making process of the nutrition support intervention of staff within a care home in the Republic of Ireland to evaluate the process of malnutrition prevention and treatment.

**Methods**

A cross sectional study design was selected for the purpose of this study. Purposive sampling was used to gather a sample group of five staff members working within the care home, a care home manager, nursing staff and a member of the catering team. Face to face interviews took place within the care home.

All of the interviews were transcribed and qualitative thematic analysis was used to analyse the data.

**Results**

Thematic analysis of the interview transcripts revealed the main themes of deciding on nutrition support in the care home depended on;

- Education and training
- Patient centered care
- Importance of communication
- Nutrition support options available

These themes can be seen in Table One.

**Discussion and Conclusion**

This study identified four main themes during the staff’s decision-making process of nutrition support for its residents in the prevention and treatment of malnutrition within this specific care home. The study identified there is a lack of training and education on MUST and nutritional requirements in the elderly. These results are similar to findings from research carried out within other care homes in the U.K that have not received adequate nutrition screening (NHS, 2018). The study also identified patient centered care and importance of communication as two key components to nutrition support decision making which other studies have not previously discussed. These themes could help to enhance care pathways in the care home setting. The role of the dietitian is imperative for care home staff in terms of ONS prescription and advice and also educational training programmes (De Paor 2010) (O Donoghue, 2016).

There are a limited number of community dietitians available in the Republic of Ireland so recommendations should be suitable for care home staff to follow independently.

In conclusion, this small scale study suggests it is imperative that pathways are in place across care home settings to combat the risk of malnutrition throughout the Republic of Ireland in view of the ageing population and anticipated pressure for the HSE in the coming years.

**References**

- National Health Service (NHS). 2018. Focus on Undernutrition. Online. Available at: http://www.focusonundernutrition.co.uk/home