Aged Care Staff Skills and Training

Position

Dietitians Australia maintains that the successful implementation of integrated nutrition care and the provision of nutritious enjoyable food is a complicated undertaking. It requires a trained workforce, working within their scope of practice and present in sufficient numbers who are guided by contemporary policies and procedures.

Nutrition is everyone's business, so it is essential that:

- Nutrition training is included in the core content of vocational education training (VET) qualifications for aged care staff

- A new accreditation requirement is introduced to ensure all aged care workers complete training modules on food, nutrition and the dining experience annually, to keep nutrition knowledge and skills current

- Minimum staff time standards are established for dietitian services in residential and community aged care

- Accredited Practising Dietitians (APDs) are included in Aged Care Assessment Teams, wound care services, dementia care teams, community education programs directed at reducing malnutrition, falls and wounds

- New models and innovative approaches are introduced to support student placement experiences in the aged care sector

Recommendations

1. Build competency of aged care staff by including food and nutrition skills in the **core content of vocational education training (VET) qualifications** for personal care workers, chefs and foodservice staff and formal qualifications for nurses (enrolled and registered nurses). This will ensure graduates have adequate food and nutrition knowledge and skills to support their clients and identify when a client should be referred to an APD for higher level dietary assistance.

2. Introduce a **new accreditation requirement** that all aged care workers (including care staff and food service staff working in residential aged care, day programs, respite care and community care) must complete training modules on food, nutrition and the dining experience annually, to keep nutrition knowledge and skills current. Training is to be provided by credentialed organisations (like Dietitians Australia) or approved professionals (eg. Accredited Practising Dietitians).

3. Develop and implement **food and nutrition training for accreditation surveyors** from the Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission with input/guidance from APDs experienced in aged care.

4. Establish **minimum staff time standards in community and residential aged care for dietitian services**.[1] In order to set minimum benchmarks for dietitian services, it is important to consider that APD support in aged care is a mix of individual clinical care, management of

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food and nutrition systems (including foodservice systems) and staff training. Therefore minimum benchmarks for dietitian services needs to consider not only the clinical care components, but also the systems management and staff training components. In British Columbia Canada, Aged Care Homes must have at least one registered dietitian who is a member of the staff and who is on site at the Home for at least 30 minutes per resident per month to carry out clinical and nutrition care duties. There must also be at least one nutrition manager for the Home. Where the registered dietitian for the Home is also a nutrition manager for the Home, any time spent working in the capacity of nutrition manager does not count towards the 30 minutes per resident per month time requirement for the registered dietitian.[2]

5. Mandate that aged care providers **include APDs in Aged Care Assessment Teams, wound care services, dementia care teams and community education programs** directed at reducing the risk of malnutrition, falls and wounds, to support older people and to guide other workers in nutrition care.

6. Introduce **new models and innovative approaches to student placement experiences** in the aged care sector for allied health professionals, including dietitians, in training. For example, change Medicare and DVA health care arrangements to allow allied health students on placement to deliver part of the service when supervised by a qualified allied health care professional. The current system is a major barrier to supporting students in exposure to practice in aged care, and to gaining skills and knowledge in aged care to prepare them for practice after graduation.

Background

Aged care staff with vocational education training may have completed Certificate III in Individual Support or Certificate IV in Ageing Support level courses without studying any food or nutrition component. This impacts on quality of care when personal care workers assisting aged care clients in the community with grocery shopping and meal preparation do not have basic understanding of food and nutrition. Chefs and cooks in residential aged care may not have sound knowledge of therapeutic or texture modified diets, and may be more uncertain when combination diets are required. The outcome for the older person is a meal which lacks the necessary nutrients or includes items which pose a risk of harm.

The knowledge and skills of APDs to improve food and nutrition systems in aged care, not just individual outcomes, need to be valued and utilised. APDs play a key role in improving consumer quality of life through improvements to food systems (eg. via menu and mealtime quality assessments), the development and implementation of nutrition policies and procedures (eg. for malnutrition screening and management) and upskilling aged care staff (eg. via food and nutrition training).

References

1. How Australian residential aged care staffing levels compare with international and national benchmarks. Australian Health Services Research Institute, University of Wollongong Oct 2019. https://agedcare.royalcommission.gov.au/news-and-media/research-paper-1-how-australian-residential-aged-care-staffing-levels-compare-international-and-national-benchmarks
2. A Guide to the Long-Term Care Homes Act, 2007 and Regulation 79/10. The Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care, Province of Ontario, Canada. Available from: http://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/public/programs/ltc/docs/ltcha_guide_phase1.pdf