

I am a Dietitian!

I am a Dietitian working in Northern Ireland (NI). There are approximately 200 Dietitians working in NI for a population of 1.8million. NI is part of the United Kingdom (UK) which has an overall population of 62 million. In the UK Registered Dietitians (RDs) are the only qualified health professionals who assess, diagnose and treat diet and nutrition problems at an individual and wider public health level. They use the most up-to-date public health and scientific research on food, health and disease, which they translate into practical guidance to enable people to make appropriate lifestyle and food choices. Dietitians are the only nutrition professionals to be statutorily regulated and governed by an ethical code. Dietitians work in the NHS, public health nutrition, private practice, industry, education, research, sport, media, public relations, publishing, Non Government Organizations and government. Their advice influences food and health policy across the spectrum from government to local communities and individuals.

The Professional Body for Dietitians in the UK is the British Dietetic Association (BDA). It was established in 1936. Its aims are to:

- advance the science and practice of dietetics and associated subjects
- promote training and education in the science and practice of dietetics and associated subjects
- maintain, develop and promote the interests of its members through negotiations with their employers on issues related to pay and job security and terms and conditions of employment

The BDA has more than six and a half thousand members. It supports members who work in all the above mentioned areas.

Dietetics is a degree profession. I got my first permanent job in the Belfast City Hospital. This was and still is a

large teaching hospital which had a number



Pauline Douglas, United Kingdom

of regional specialities including, renal, respiratory, urology, eating disorders and later oncology. My main clinical role was as a nutritional support Dietitian working with patients who had or were undergoing major gastrointestinal surgery. I became Manager of the service in 1989 and remained in that position until I was appointed Senior Lecturer / Clinical Dietetic Facilitator, University of Ulster in 2006. My role is to prepare students for practice placement which is an integral part of their degree and also to ensure the Dietitians are trained to deliver a placement which meets the standards led down by the regulatory bodies and also enables the students to meet the required learning outcomes.

In the UK most Dietitians work for the National Health Service which was launched in 1948 and has grown to become the world's largest publicly funded health service. The core principle of the NHS is that it should provide good healthcare and be available to all, regardless of wealth. With the exception of charges for some prescriptions and optical and dental services, the NHS remains free at the point of use for anyone who is resident in the UK. It covers everything from antenatal screening and routine treatments for coughs and colds to open heart surgery, accident and emergency treatment and end-of-life care. It is funded centrally from national taxation. The NHS employs

more than 1.7m people with about half clinically qualified.

To work in the NHS Dietitians must be registered with the Health Professions Council (HPC). The HPC is an independent UK healthcare regulator for Allied Health Professions. Its primary purpose is to safeguard the health and wellbeing of persons using or needing the services of registrants.

It: -

- set standards for entry to the Register and for continued registration
- approves education and training programmes that successfully deliver
- those standards
- maintains a register of individuals who successfully complete those
- programmes
- takes action if the standards may not have been met

Dietitians are facing real challenges at present as UK public services are reorganized. These changes necessitate different ways of working that are very challenging. Also the HPC is auditing Dietitians this year to ensure they can demonstrate they remain competent to practice. The BDA are guiding the profession through this process.

My main interest and drive in dietetics continues to be the promotion of dietetic professional practice using the developing evidence base, throughout the UK, Europe and the rest of the world.

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