

Dietitians, as experts and leaders in human nutrition, are uniquely qualified to develop and implement strategies to optimise dietary intake for adults and children diagnosed with cancer. They have a key role in the multi-disciplinary team to ensure that nutrition is optimised from diagnosis and the beginning of the treatment pathway through to rehabilitation, cancer survivorship as well as to palliative care and end of life. They work in a variety of care settings including cancer centres, general hospitals, hospices and the community. Dietitians are essential to the development of policy and guidelines for the management of malnutrition, disease related nutritional problems (short and long term) and quality of life associated with cancer and its treatment in addition to research and education of all health care professionals.

### *Role of the dietitian*

The complex interaction between dietary intake, nutritional status and cancer requires the dietitian to be a specialist in oncology [1–3].

- Dietitians are uniquely qualified to provide nutrition education and counselling for the prevention of cancer [1].
- Dietitians utilise their evidence based knowledge and skills to assess nutritional status and body composition at all stages of cancer care [2–5].
- Dietitians assess nutritional requirements because changes in dietary intake and metabolism can arise as a result of cancer and be identified as cancer cachexia and/or are at risk of developing malnutrition [2–5].
- Dietitians advise and plan suitable individualised nutritional support including dietary counselling, oral nutritional supplements, enteral and parenteral nutrition support appropriate to all types of cancer [2–4].
- Dietitians monitor nutritional status and evaluate the effectiveness of nutritional support to improve/preserve nutrition status, minimize gastrointestinal adverse events, and to optimise clinical outcomes; poor nutrition status can impact on tolerance to cancer treatment [2, 6, 7].
- Dietitians advise on the optimal diet for people who gain weight during treatment

### *About The European Federation of the Associations of Dietitians (EFAD)*

EFAD is the voice of 35.000 European dietitians - more than half the profession – and is the only organisation advocating for dietitians in Europe.

EFAD was established in 1978 with aims to:

- Promote the development of the dietetic profession
- Develop dietetics on a scientific and professional level in the common interest of the member associations
- Facilitate communication between national dietetic associations and other organisations – professional, educational, and governmental
- Encourage a better nutrition situation for the population of the member countries of Europe.

Membership of the Federation is open all National Associations of Dietitians from member states of Europe. EFAD currently has 34 member associations, representing over 35,000 dietitians in 27 European countries.

### *Definition of a Dietitian:*

A dietitian is a person with a qualification in Nutrition & Dietetics recognised by a national authority. The dietitian applies the science of nutrition to the feeding and education of groups of people and individuals in both health and disease.

For further information please visit the web site: [www.efad.org](http://www.efad.org)

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as this can influence the risk of recurrence, for example, in breast and prostate cancer and worsen prognosis [8].

- Dietary intervention can improve nutritional status which impacts on overall survival, disease-free survival and quality of life [6, 7].
- Dietitians support patients with advanced cancer receiving palliative care to eat and drink according to goals based on comfort [9].
- Dietitians are core members of the multidisciplinary team and are ideally placed to discuss the ethics of nutrition care.
- Dietitians support people with cancer to make informed choices regarding unproven dietary interventions and when to take vitamin and mineral supplementation [2, 3, 9].
- Dietitians contribute to the teaching of all health care professionals on to the identification and management of nutrition in cancer [5, 6, 7].
- Dietitians initiate and contribute to research projects on nutrition and cancer.
- Dietitians advise people with cancer on adequate food choices to reduce adverse effects of food borne micro-organisms.

### **References**

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