

Current status of nutrition services in nursing homes in the Netherlands

Leads for improved patient satisfaction and outcomes

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Description of the initiative

Optimal nutrition is expected to reduce the burden of malnutrition for patients admitted to an institution. We recently described 30 quality criteria for optimal nutrition services in hospitals as part of a governmental initiative, showing that less than 50% of hospitals provided adequate nutrition services that met the quality criteria and patients' expectations. Publication of this report resulted in increased awareness and many nation-wide initiatives to improve nutritional services in hospitals. The current status of nutrition services in nursing homes in the Netherlands has never been investigated despite the higher prevalence of malnutrition (25% in nursing homes vs. 15% in hospitals). This study aims to investigate nutrition services and to stimulate improvement policies in nursing homes in The Netherlands.

Rationale/Background of the initiative

Malnutrition is a widespread problem in nursing homes and is associated with impaired functional outcomes. Despite increased requirements (e.g. for protein), 40% of nursing home residents complete less than half of their main meal and the dietician is consulted in less than 50% of the cases of malnutrition or sarcopenia. In this light, it is essential that nutrition services in nursing homes provide attractive, nutritious meals and a variety of snacks and supplements to meet daily requirements.

Scope of project, activities, implementation

We will conduct a national survey on nutrition services in approximately 500 nursing homes in The Netherlands. Nutrition services encompass all aspects of daily foods, drinks and clinical nutrition (oral nutritional supplements and tube feeding) for residents of health care institutions. For this survey, we will send a web-based questionnaire to relevant stakeholders (facility management and dietetics) in nursing homes in The Netherlands. The questionnaire incorporates 10 aspects of nutrition services: distribution, ordering procedures, population-specific options, menu options, ambiance, patient satisfaction, multidisciplinary responsibilities, financial aspects, waste management and nutritional composition. This project requires an investigator (4 months 0.60 FTE, 20,000 E), supervisor (4 months, 0.15 FTE, 6,000 E) and budget for materials (e.g. SurveyMonkey license, overhead, 4,000 E), in total 30,000 E.

Implementation

Answers from the survey will be compared with the 30 predefined quality criteria for adequate nutrition services. A benchmark score will be calculated as a percentage of the 30 quality criteria. The benchmark score indicates the similarity with the 'ideal' nutrition concept that meets all quality criteria (=100%). Consecutively, a personalized report discussing the benchmark score and aspects that need improvement will be sent to every participating nursing home. The Dutch government will communicate the outcomes and draw attention on a national level, thus stimulating positive competition and improvement policies.

Results/Outcomes

The key learnings include the individual benchmark scores and a top 3 of nursing homes with the best benchmark scores. Further on, this survey can serve as a baseline measurement that stimulates improvement policies, especially in nursing homes that have a low benchmark score.

Conclusions

This survey will draw attention for malnutrition and optimal food intake in nursing homes, and will stimulate nursing homes to improve nutritional care. In this way, nursing home residents will experience more wellbeing and improved outcomes.