



The Association
of UK Dietitians

Catherine Casewell - Specialist
Paediatric Dietitian



Careers in Dietetics:

Specialist Paediatric Dietitian

Tell us about your NHS role and the difference it makes to patient care:

Working in my role on a Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU) has allowed me to see both infants and their parents admitted to NICU, sometimes at their absolute worst, emotionally and physically, to within days or weeks leave looking and feeling better and grateful. It's lovely to work with babies often born so early, leaving our NICU bigger and stronger.

Although my primary role is to ensure that all infants admitted to the unit receive the appropriate nutritional support for growth and development, it also involves supporting families to optimise their emotional and physical wellbeing to care for their infants.

Working for the NHS has taught me that the smallest things can make the biggest difference to people.

What does a day in the life of your role look like?

I work full time with a split role between Ashford and St Peter's Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust (ASPH)

three days a week and as the Kent, Surrey and Sussex Operational Delivery Network (KSS ODN) Neonatal Dietitian two days a week. In my clinical role, I work on our Level 3 Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU) two mornings a week, delivering dietetic care to those infants born prematurely, or who require additional support following birth.

On the NICU I review the babies who come into the unit on the days that I'm not working at ASPH. I then meet with the MDT, where we discuss the babies in our care and review any medical and social issues. Clinical support from a Dietitian can include monitoring their weights and heights, adjusting feeding regimens as required, discussing and optimising breast milk supply with breast feeding mums and supporting the transition from naso-gastric tube feeding to oral feeding. We also discuss non-clinical duties that maybe required from



the AHP team on the unit such as updating the parent information board and the intranet and internet, and training and education for staff. During this meeting, the team will highlight any infants that require dietetic input.

At St Peter's Hospital, I will check the infants' weight, length and head circumference to document and record these. This enables me to identify and monitor the trend in growth. I'll then talk to the team and the parents about feed tolerance and current volumes prescribed, and review relevant biochemistry.

In St Peter's Hospital NICU, we follow the principles of family integrated care, which means fully involving the parents in their babies' care to improve chances of a healthier future. I use the ward round as an opportunity to discuss feeding preferences with parents. I speak with new breastfeeding mum's regarding strategies to optimise breast milk production and ensuring their dietary intake is adequate. I also provide clear information to all parents on the different feeding strategies available to optimise growth and development and then we agree a feeding plan.

Along with ward rounds, I catch-up with the Neonatal Community Outreach team (NCOT). During this session, the team reviews all the babies currently at home and requiring on-going monitoring for growth and feeding. The NCOT team will usually inform parents of any changes to feeding plans; if more complex dietetic intervention is required, then I arrange to call parents for further discussion. I also have a regular dietetic outpatient clinic where I can continue ongoing dietetic management once the community team are able to discharge the babies from their care.

I love my job and being part of such a committed Neonatal team. It's a real privilege working with babies and families at such a vulnerable and special time in their lives.

Why do you love working in the NHS?

Working in the NHS is about caring and working with people to improve lives but it's also about many other things. Through my job role I have grown in confidence in many areas, not just dietetic knowledge. It has developed my conversational skills and the ability to integrate care with families to sometimes consider different treatment pathways, as well as build resilience and improve my determination.

It's about working as a team with a wide variety of people, putting patients first and having that passion for excellent.

Can you tell us a bit about your educational background? What education route did you take, and why? What are your qualifications.

I qualified from Leeds Metropolitan University in 1997 with a degree in Nutrition and Dietetics after completing the 4 year degree course. I then went on to work at Birmingham Heartlands NHS Trust as my first role!

I always knew I wanted to work in paediatrics, and so when the opportunity arose to apply for a senior dietitian at Birmingham Children's Hospital, I applied and was lucky enough to be offered the job. I was there for 3 years, working in rotations including cardiology, renal and oncology and BMT. During my time at the Children's Hospital, I also completed the BDA Paediatric Course.

In October 2002, I relocated to Surrey. I was initially the only full time Paediatric Dietitian at Ashford and St Peter's Hospital covering a wide range of specialities, one of them being neonates. Over the last decade, the paediatric dietetic team at ASPH has developed significantly. I have an excellent split role, spending 2 mornings a week providing the NICU inpatient service and supporting the outreach service, and also working as the specialist dietitian within the MDT allergy team.

Did you undertake any work experience before applying for the role? Can you suggest any work experience that may help entering this specialism?

There is no specific work experience that is required, however having a knowledge of infant feeding, including the weaning process would be a good start. An insight into breast feeding would be useful, including practicalities and physiology of the breast and breast milk production. Knowledge of the different formulas (term and pre-term) available and nutritional composition of formula compared with breast milk would also be helpful.

Any work experience that encourages team working, caring and work with a wide variety of different people would also be beneficial. The BDA have Neonatal competencies for Dietitians and it would be useful to consider the knowledge and skills required for the level of unit that you may consider working on.

How has training and development in your role helped you so far?

Training and development/professional development is an integral part of the role. Every day I learn something new to increase my confidence and knowledge in my job to be able to provide that little bit more help or support to others in some way. Training and understanding the roles of other AHP professionals within the team has been particularly useful to understand the complete picture of neonatal care.

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What are you most proud of in your role?

Being successful in applying for the Neonatal Operational Delivery Network Role within Kent, Surrey and Sussex.

I’m also proud of my role as a respected and integral member of the Paediatric and Neonatal Departments at ASPH; working closely with such professional and friendly MDT.

What would you say to others to encourage more people to become NHS Dietitians in your Specialism

Jump out of your comfort zone and try something new!

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