

Advanced Practice Case Study:

Heather Norris

Overview

Heather is trainee Advanced Practitioner (AP) role and non-medical prescriber. She is a specialist Neonatal Dietitian and Regional Lead Dietitian for Southwest Neonatal Network.

She is a committee member of BDA Neonatal subgroup and the Breast-feeding group.

Developing from enhanced to advanced

Heather qualified as a dietitian in 1995 and began her career in a busy hospital trust. In this role she gained valuable experience in both inpatient and outpatient settings, building a strong foundation in adult dietetics. She also built experience in paediatric dietetics, initially in home enteral feeding, and later in diabetes and neonatology in a district general hospital.

Her first enhanced-level role was as a community paediatric dietitian in Bolton, where she also undertook a secondment as team lead for the paediatric weight management service. After moving to Bristol, Heather gained further acute care experience at Bristol Royal Hospital for Children, where she worked for over two years.

During this time, she developed skills across all four pillars of practice, with a particular focus on professional practice (clinical), which supported her progression into a band 7 role.

Heather then became the lead dietitian for the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU), where she continued to expand her clinical expertise. In this role, she deepened her knowledge of medications, and the complex nutritional needs of neonates.



She is a vital member of NICU team member, providing expert nutrition support across the patient feeding journey, from NICU admission through to discharge. Heather works closely with pharmacists to plan and monitor both parenteral and enteral nutrition. She collaborates with the infant feeding team to support breastfeeding, as well as the neonatal outreach and medical teams to ensure breastfeeding is prioritised.

As her role developed and her clinical leadership for caring for medically and nutritionally complex infants was recognised, Heather was encouraged to progress into an AP role. Supported by her dietetic manager, NICU matron and clinical leads, she developed a business case for a neonatal dietitian AP role to further develop her expertise across the four pillars of practice. In September 2022, she started a funded AP apprenticeship pathway.

As part of the trainee AP role, Heather is undertaking a three-year master's level degree. She is supported by a medical supervisor, who provides guidance through case study discussions and regular knowledge checks. She has one day a week allocated for study, which includes attending university, independent learning, or shadowing other professionals to broaden her experience. She continues in her core dietetic role for the remainder of the week.



Heather had previously completed the non-medical prescribing course a year prior to commencing the AP course and was able to carry this over as module credits, as it is normally a required part of the course. She also completed the 'Examination of the Newborn' module to meet the physical assessment requirements. This is an experience that has added valuable depth to her nutritional assessments.

Role Impact

For her dissertation, Heather led a quality improvement project aimed at increasing the percentage of preterm infants receiving maternal breast milk at discharge. This multidisciplinary project, involving infant feeding advisors, dietitians and speech and language therapists, developed an education package to help parents better understand the feeding journey and establish breastfeeding. The team more than doubled their original target of a 10% improvement.

Over the past three years, Heather has continued to grow in both her leadership and clinical expertise. She now provides specialist support across the South West Neonatal Network for complex surgical and non-surgical infants following their discharge from the Tertiary unit. Heather has also gained valuable

experience leading quality improvement initiatives and implementing changes in practice, both within her local service and across the wider South West Network.

Career Aspirations

As Heather transitions from a trainee into qualified AP, she is passionate about continuing to develop and shape the AP role. She particularly values collaboration, working alongside fellow dietitians and other health professionals to share knowledge, build clinical confidence, and support others in their professional growth. Heather is committed to reducing inequalities and improving outcomes for infants and their families through inclusive, evidence-based practice.



How does Heather work across the 4 pillars of practice?

As an aspiring AP, Heather has demonstrated that she works across the 4 pillars of practice. Whilst all roles require this, for an AP role this is evidenced, through post registration academic and clinical attainment, to be at masters level.

Academic and practice attainment evidenced at masters level

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trainee AP • NMP • Complex assessment, diagnosis and management of medially and nutritionally complex infants • Multiprofessional working • Collaboration with infant feeding team, neonatal team to support breastfeeding • Highly developed communication skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local neonatal quality improvement initiatives • MSc dissertation • Written chapter in Manual of Dietetic Practice • Contributed to local and regional guidelines and pathways • Contribute to nutrition trials in NICU service • Evidence-based practice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teaching on the BDA Neonatal Dietetics course • Provision of NICU nutrition education to multi-professional team • Presenting at BDA specialist study days • Contributed to UNICEF BFI learning outcomes for dietetic learners 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regional lead dietitian for the SW neonatal network • Committee member of BDA Neonatal and breastfeeding groups • Chair of local breastfeeding strategy group • Contribute to business cases • Contribute to NICU business meetings • Advocate for service users • Collaborate with key partners
Professional Practice	Research & Evidence	Facilitated Learning	Leadership