

European survey – the role of dietitians in the identification, assessment and management of dysphagia

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“In France, National Professional Councils are bodies that represent and bring together the different stakeholders of a healthcare profession at national level. Their responsibilities include improving and ensuring the quality of professional practice, contributing expert opinions and recommendations to health authorities, and helping to define priorities for continuing professional development.

The CNP-DN has been invited by the French National Authority for Health (Haute Autorité de santé – HAS) to participate in ongoing work on rehabilitation in residential care facilities for dependent older people (Établissements d’hébergement pour personnes âgées dépendantes – EHPAD). The topics addressed include, in particular, swallowing disorders in older and dependent people.

In this context, we are currently conducting a survey of dietitians’ competencies and professional practices in the field of dysphagia, both in France and internationally. Differences in scopes of practice, competency frameworks and healthcare organisation across European countries are of particular interest to our work.”

We would therefore be very grateful if you could provide us with information regarding the situation in your country.

1. Role in the identification, screening and assessment of dysphagia

- Are dietitians involved in the identification or screening of swallowing disorders in your country?
- Can dietitians perform a clinical swallowing assessment independently or as part of a multidisciplinary team?
- If so, do they use standardised tools or tests, such as the Eating Assessment Tool-10 (EAT-10), the Volume-Viscosity Swallow Test (V-VST), tests involving different volumes and consistencies, or other tools?
- Is there a specific swallowing assessment performed by dietitians? If so, we would be very grateful if you could describe its main components, for example: symptoms and warning signs, observation during meals, orofacial or oral-motor function, mastication and bolus formation, swallowing trials using foods or liquids of different consistencies and volumes, coughing, changes in voice, fatigue, or other clinical signs.
- Do dietitians conduct practical swallowing trials using different food consistencies or liquid viscosities?
- Based on their assessment, can dietitians recommend or determine a particular food consistency or liquid viscosity? Can they make this decision independently, or is assessment or validation by another healthcare professional required?

2. Initial education and continuing professional development

- Are knowledge and competencies relating to dysphagia and swallowing assessment included in the initial education and training of dietitians?
- If so, could you indicate approximately how many hours of training are devoted to this area? If possible, we would be interested in distinguishing between theoretical and practical training.
- Are there continuing education programmes, certifications or additional qualifications that enable dietitians to acquire more advanced competencies in dysphagia and swallowing assessment?
- If so, approximately how long are these programmes, and to what extent do they include practical training, clinical placements or supervised clinical practice?

3. Professional practice

- Are dietitians routinely involved in the care of people with dysphagia?
- In which healthcare settings are they mainly involved—for example, residential care facilities for older people, hospitals, neurology, rehabilitation or outpatient care?
- Is their role mainly focused on nutritional status, hydration and food intake, or does it also include functional or clinical aspects of swallowing?
- How is the dietitian's role usually coordinated with that of other healthcare professionals involved in the identification, diagnosis and treatment of swallowing disorders in your country?
- Are there situations in which referral to another healthcare professional or for a specialist swallowing assessment is mandatory?

4. Food textures, liquid viscosity and international standards

- How widely is the International Dysphagia Diet Standardisation Initiative (IDDSI) used in your country, particularly in residential care facilities for older people?
- What role do dietitians play in determining, implementing and reassessing modified food textures and liquid viscosities?
- Are dietitians involved in staff training and in checking whether foods and drinks actually comply with the recommended or prescribed IDDSI levels?

5. Regulatory and professional framework and development of competencies

- Are these activities defined by legislation or professional regulation, national guidelines or competency frameworks, or are they mainly determined by local professional practice?
- If there are any relevant legal provisions, guidelines, recommendations, competency frameworks, educational curricula, continuing education programmes or professional standards, we would be very grateful if you could share these documents with us or provide the relevant references.

- Has your organisation previously worked, or is it currently working, on developing or extending dietitians' competencies in the field of dysphagia?
- Have dietitians' competencies in this area changed in recent years? If so, we would be particularly interested in understanding both the reasons behind these developments and how they were implemented in practice.
- Are there dietitians in your country with particular expertise in dysphagia, or professional groups, scientific working groups or educational institutions specialising in this area? If so, we would greatly appreciate an introduction to these professionals or organisations.
- The aim of our work is to gain a better understanding of the different models currently used across Europe and, in particular, to identify the competencies that dietitians actually exercise, the training required to develop and exercise these competencies, and how their role is coordinated with that of other healthcare professionals involved in the care of people with swallowing disorders.

Even a partial response to these questions would be extremely valuable to our work.

Thank you very much for your assistance and for the time devoted to our request.