

# Changing our ways: Developing an advanced practice role for dietitians

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**Background:** Peter Mac's Nutrition Department manages in excess of 300 home enteral nutrition patients annually. A majority of these patients have head and neck or gastrointestinal cancer, a nasogastric or gastrostomy feeding tube inserted, and undergo complex high nutritional risk treatment. With approximately 100 gastrostomy feeding tubes inserted annually and intense dietitian involvement required for these patients, an opportunity for an advanced practice role managing gastrostomy feeding tubes was evident.

**Method:** A grant was received to develop and embark on a credentialing program for dietitians to remove and replace gastrostomy feeding tubes. Support was obtained from the multi-disciplinary team to endorse and assist with development of the program, and grant competence. Documents from existing programs were obtained and a mentoring relationship was established with an existing successful program. All requirements for the role were identified, including oncology and health service specific, legal, and infection control aspects. A program was developed, reviewed by key stakeholders and authorised before dietitians began undertaking the program.

**Results:** An oncology specific credentialing program was developed. This program covers all aspects of qualification and training requirements, competency attainment and maintenance. Preliminary results suggest this advanced practice role will improve patient centred care with patients benefiting from having gastrostomy feeding tube management being conducted by dietitians involved throughout their care, reduced waiting times for gastrostomy care, and improved gastrostomy care coordination. Early results also suggest this role will provide natural career progression and leadership opportunities for dietitians, and improved staff retention.

**Discussion:** Implementation of this advanced practice role has considered the sustainability requirements to maintain this program, ensuring continued opportunities for future dietitians. Future evaluations are planned to ensure the program continues to meet the needs of all clinicians involved whilst maintaining optimal patient care, as well as to identify future opportunities for the role.