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# NNEdPro Global Centre for Nutrition and Health

Advancing and implementing nutrition knowledge  
to improve health, wellbeing and society

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## Accelerating Nutrition Capacity Building for UK Doctors and Health Professionals

### The Nutrition Education Policy in Healthcare Practice (NEPHELP) Initiative and the UK Nutrition Implementation Coalition (NNEdPro, ERimNN, Nutritank and Culinary Medicine UK)

Nutrition from research to education, is a topical<sup>1,2</sup> and often emotive subject.<sup>3</sup> Educational research tells us that doctors and health professionals, including nurses, recognise the importance of nutrition but can feel underequipped to implement it into care, which in part can be attributed to the paucity of nutrition education.<sup>4-6</sup> Additionally, while nurses cite the importance of nutrition for patient well-being and recovery, a number of barriers prevent them from improving nutrition care, including pressures within health systems,<sup>7</sup> nurses' beliefs about their responsibilities, and other health professionals' views.<sup>8,9</sup>

In response to these concerns, there has been a stepped increase over the past two decades in the efforts of professional organisations towards developing special interest groups<sup>10,11</sup> and educational resources,<sup>12,13,14</sup> to improve nutrition knowledge. However, despite these endeavours, and Government guidance,<sup>15,16</sup> delivering effective nutrition care in both primary and secondary settings remains challenging. Meanwhile, the double burden of malnutrition remains prevalent in healthcare, alongside disease-related malnutrition<sup>17</sup> and micronutrient deficiencies.<sup>18</sup> Poor quality diets remain a key preventable risk factor for non-communicable diseases.<sup>19</sup> Further, nutrition is central to treating many commonly presenting conditions, ranging from irritable bowel syndrome to Type-2 diabetes, and increasingly appears to play a key role in the immune response,<sup>1</sup> frailty and ageing.<sup>20</sup> Recognising the pivotal role of nutrition in health and disease is essential for all health professionals to ensure nutrition is integrated within standard practice, including onward referral to nutrition specialist services.

#### **Nutrition Education Policy in Healthcare practice (NEPHELP)**

##### **Gaining insights and developing a toolkit**

NEPHELP is a joint initiative of the 'NNEdPro Global Centre for Nutrition and Health' in close partnership with 'Education and Research in medical Nutrition Network (ERimNN)'. It is supported by continuing educational grants to support nutritional care provided by health professionals. NEPHELP builds on previous work by NNEdPro over 2008-13 across regions of England, including piloting a novel nutrition education intervention

across 15 medical schools, as well as working with junior doctors and multidisciplinary teams (MDTs) across three trusts, to address auditable nutrition care standards. Initially, NEPHELP gained semi-qualitative insights into the expressed nutrition training needs of junior doctors, as well as representatives of carers and patients in the East of England. These insights were complemented through a series of surveys of medical students undertaken in collaboration with Nutritank, leading to the landmark publication 'Time for Nutrition in Medical Education'<sup>21</sup>

Informed by a range of findings from key stakeholders, a teaching package was developed and piloted to a large multidisciplinary group of healthcare professionals through the BMJ International Forum on Quality and Safety in Healthcare. This was then used to deliver nutrition education to junior doctors over 2019, through a series of workshops delivered across England to over 200 participants. Evaluation data were gathered on participants' opinions on the relevance of nutrition education to their practice. These findings were used to inform the strategic direction of NEPHELP and subsequent workshop development. This iterative action research methodology highlighted the real-world issues affecting doctors' engagement with nutrition education and practice, including the following:

- The lack of practical applicability of taught content to the clinical situations that doctors face
- The need for 'local' doctors or nutrition experts as role models to participate in the delivery of education
- The difficulties doctors have in identifying appropriate courses from the range of educational materials promoted by various organisations and social media
- The systemic barriers and the lack of prioritisation amongst colleagues and seniors to implement nutritional care
- The uncertainty of inter-professional roles and responsibilities in delivering nutrition services
- The specific education and support needs for those working in primary care in disease prevention and management.

#### **Consolidating resources and facilitating nutrition role models in practice**

Utilising earlier insights and simultaneously responding to the global challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, the next stage of the NEPHELP initiative, focuses on five key areas:

- Inclusion of General Practitioners (GPs) and primary care professionals in nutrition capacity building alongside junior doctors (predominantly in secondary care)
- Adaptation of knowledge resources to address nutrition and COVID-19 related issues in clinical and public health practice
- Development of effective virtual learning environments and digital tools for teaching, learning, knowledge assessment and impact evaluation
- Training and facilitation of champions as nutrition role models in practice for sustained rollout of awareness and education
- Policy sensitive advocacy and communications to aid uptake and implementation.

In alignment with current NEPHELP priorities, in September 2020, an online version of the NNEdPro Summer School in Applied Human Nutrition<sup>23</sup> was successfully piloted including GPs from the UK. From this group, interested doctors are being supported further with education and resources, transforming to 'nutrition champions' who share learning with colleagues in their respective practices, while also helping the NEPHELP team identify real-world challenges. This two-way learning process is supported by a virtual learning environment (VLE), utilising digital infrastructure and resources from the NNEdPro Summer School, Annual Summit<sup>22</sup> and the continuing professional development programme of the International Academy of Nutrition Educators (IANE)<sup>23</sup>. In collaboration with GP nutrition champions, bespoke, interactive materials are being prepared to address specific primary care needs, support continued learning, and promote educational engagement. It also provides a forum for critical debate, the review of current research, and sharing useful tools to assist practice development.

Research highlights the importance of role models for learning and development of practice-based expertise.<sup>24</sup> Supporting nutrition

champions within primary care with awareness around the transfer of care to and from secondary settings, as well as the community, provides a transformational model that can be applied across professions and settings. In NEPHELP added critical debate is encouraged through digital discussion boards developed around 'living evidence' collections, such as the NNEdPro Nutrition and COVID-19 Taskforce compilation<sup>25</sup> presented on the open access iKANN26 platform, linked with BMJ Nutrition, Prevention and Health.<sup>27</sup> This challenges perceptions of a poor science base behind nutrition often fuelled by popular media.<sup>28</sup> Looking to the future, NEPHELP has extended collaborative reach in primary care ranging from GP special interest groups through to a new strategic partnership with 'Modality', one of UK's largest organised network of GP practices catering to over 650,000 patients across the country.

#### **The UK Nutrition Implementation Coalition**

One of the challenges facing effective nutrition education is the risk of silo working and inadvertent duplication of efforts, exacerbated by a lack of clarity in the roles and responsibilities of those delivering nutritional care.<sup>29</sup> In mitigating such concerns, over 2019-20, the NEPHELP initiative formed a coalition of four key organisations with inter-related implementation aims: NNEdPro, ERimNN, Nutritank and Culinary Medicine UK. Within the Nutrition Implementation Coalition (NIC), each organisation has unique areas of focus (see **Figure 1** on next page) but together the coalition works towards common goals of prioritising and strengthening evidence-informed nutrition education in practice, particularly through sharing networks, case studies and educational resources. Bringing together doctors, nurses, dietitians, nutritionists, educators, and researchers to share their expertise and knowledge enables ongoing stakeholder consultation, including interactions with regulatory bodies, policymakers, curriculum developers, and the target healthcare workforce. Together, the coalition contributes to the NNEdPro strategic aim of developing 'scalable educational modules that increase health systems nutrition capacity.'<sup>1</sup> In doing so, the coalition provides expert interprofessional peer support and critical review of outputs. The NIC is hosted by the NNEdPro UK and Ireland Regional Network, which enables triannual internal knowledge exchange meetings,<sup>30</sup> as well as external knowledge exchange at the annual ERimNN showcase organised from Brighton.<sup>31</sup> The coalition demonstrates the benefits of collaboration via shared publications,<sup>6</sup> social media and advocacy. Coalition members have also played a key role in contributing to the NNEdPro COVID-19 Taskforce and its emerging insights on the role of nutrition in the pandemic.<sup>25</sup> February 2021 alone, provides three examples of working with a common voice for implementation. All coalition members played a key role together in the roundtable for final review of the revised Undergraduate Medical Nutrition Education Curriculum convened by the Association for Nutrition and its Inter-Professional Group; whilst Nutritank and NNEdPro together made key speaker and panel contributions to the impactful national conference of the Royal Society of Medicine, examining the place of nutrition in medical education; and NNEdPro with ERimNN contributed jointly to live policy dialogue in the All Party Parliamentary Forum on Food and Health, around the Hospital Food Review and its implications for nutrition capacity building across the National Health Service.

#### **Next steps**

NEPHELP insights will continue to support a dynamic and strategic nutrition education roadmap to inform stakeholders at all levels. Furthermore, pooling resources and expertise, NEPHELP and the UK NIC can take follow this roadmap through to improved patient and public health outcomes through integrated, equitable and high-quality nutrition care.

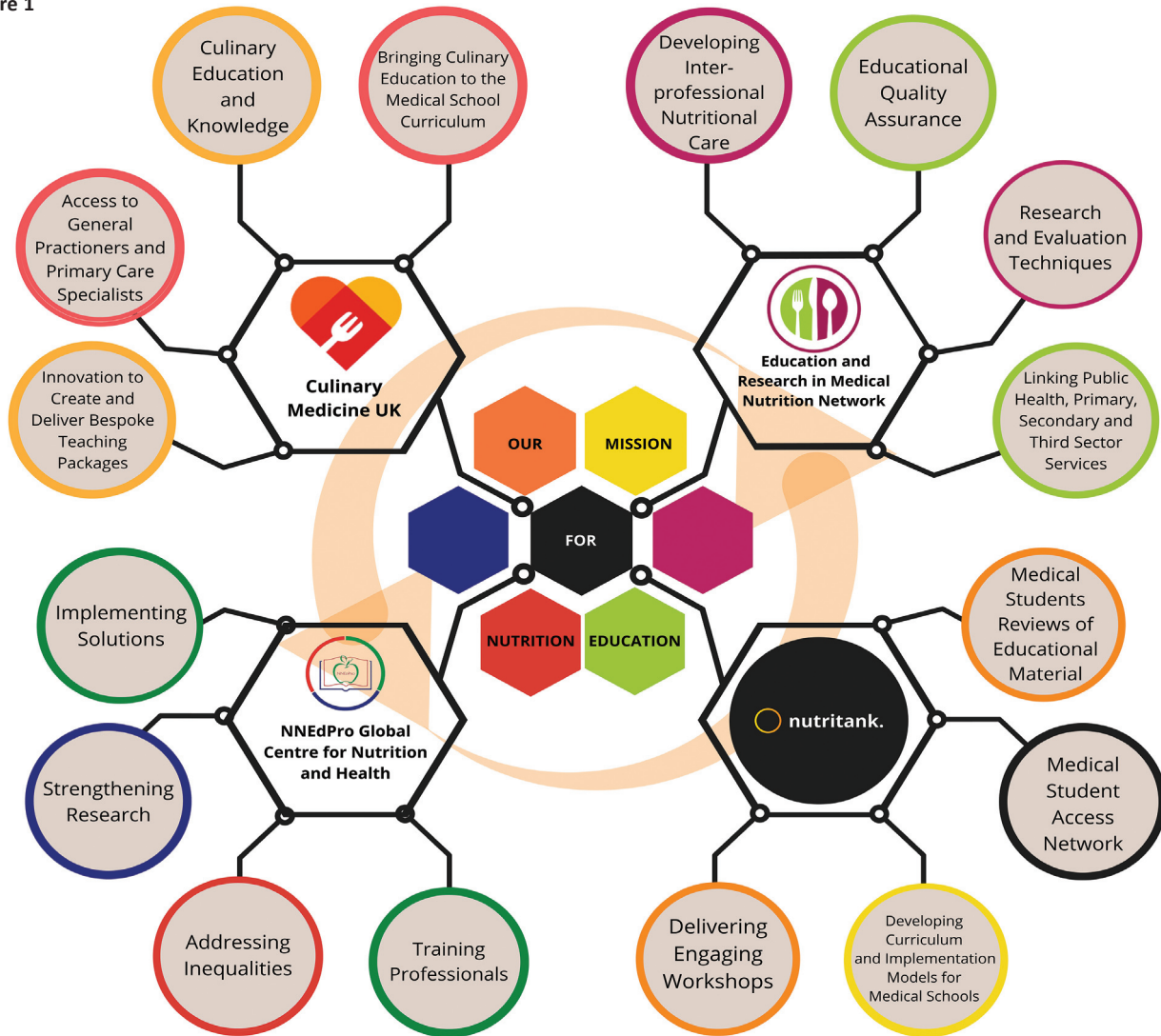


COVID-19 resources  
[www.nnedpro.org.uk/coronavirus](http://www.nnedpro.org.uk/coronavirus)



Nutrition resources  
[www.nnedpro.org.uk/nutrition-resources](http://www.nnedpro.org.uk/nutrition-resources)

Figure 1



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