

Dietitians want more training to help those with eating disorders

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Dietitians play an important role in nutrition care in healthcare teams but want more training to help patients with eating disorders a Griffith University study has found.

The international review of 14 studies from the US, Australia, England,

Brazil and Canada included 1192 participants—dietitians, those with eating disorders (EDs), parents and carers and other [health professionals](#).

It found while dietitians may be one of the first health professionals to recognize disordered eating and behaviors, their role outside hospitals can be unclear.

"The study revealed that while dietitians are integral in the identification, treatment and management of EDs, uncertainty regarding scope of practice can influence their role in the treating team," said lead researcher Alana Heafala, a Ph.D. candidate with Griffith University's Healthy Primary Care team.

"Dietitians described having a moderate level of confidence to provide care to ED patients with a strong desire for more [training](#) and education.

"Some dietitians raised awareness of the signs and symptoms of eating disorders to other health professionals and teachers, but there was disagreement about whether only those with specialist training should provide care for those with EDs.

"Clarifying the roles and responsibilities of dietitians would be beneficial to ensure all treating team members have a clear understanding and can explain their involvement to patients."

The review highlighted that while carers valued the role and support of dietitians, patients had mixed perspectives with some finding their services only moderately helpful or as a means to control their food intake rather than focussing on recovery.

"Future research which includes the lived experience of those with EDs and carers may offer a richer understanding of this population," Heafala said.

"Foundational training in tertiary dietetic programs that align with existing practice standards may also help ensure dietitians are competent in identifying disordered eating behaviors and making appropriate referrals to clinicians."

The study, published in *The Journal of Human Nutrition and Dietetics*, is the first review to explore the experiences of [nutrition care](#) from the perspectives of dietitians, other [health](#) professionals, patients and carers.

More information: Alana Heafala et al, What role do dietitians have in providing nutrition care for eating disorder treatment? An integrative review, *Journal of Human Nutrition and Dietetics* (2021). [DOI: 10.1111/jhn.12927](#)

Provided by Griffith University

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