

Community-based Nutritional Care

Assessment of malnutrition and nutrition risk in a specialized geriatric population

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Introduction: Malnutrition and nutrition risk, common in older adults, leads to declines in health and reduced physical and cognitive functioning. Nutrition screening identifies patients at nutrition risk and who are appropriate for Registered Dietitian (RD) assessment and intervention.

Objectives: To identify malnutrition risk in a population of older adults (> 65 years) in a specialized geriatric clinic, to identify characteristics of those classified as malnourished or at risk of malnutrition, and to develop a process for nutrition assessment and intervention.

Methods: Cross-sectional study of nutrition risk, using the Mini Nutritional Assessment Short Form (MNA®-SF), was conducted over a twelve-month period in a specialized geriatric clinic. Specific referral criteria: dementia management, chronic disease management, functional status decline, frailty, and frequency of falls. The MNA®-SF screen was completed by nurse assessors during the initial clinic visit. Demographic information, height and weight were measured, and BMI determined. For patients identified at nutrition risk, further steps included RD review, nutrition assessment and intervention.

Results: Nutrition screens were completed on 235 patients, (mean age of 80 (SD=8), 60% female). Forty-two percent (n=98) were identified as at risk: 8% (n=18) were malnourished and 34% (n=80) at risk of malnutrition. In the Nutrition risk group, 51% (n=41/80) reported weight loss. Mean Body Mass Index (BMI) was 26.4 kg/m² (IQR: 23.3-29.7). No patients with a BMI > = 30 were malnourished; 21% of the at-risk patients were obese (n=17/80).

Conclusions: Nutrition screening identified a cohort (n=59/235; 25%) as malnourished/at risk that would benefit from RD nutrition assessment and intervention. This study highlights nutrition risk in a specialized geriatric population and will inform next steps in developing nutrition screening and intervention processes.

Significance to field: Nutrition screening of geriatric patients referred for specialized geriatric assessment is recommended. This project provides rationale for advocacy for the role of the RD within a specialized geriatric clinic.