

**Abstract Title:** Hydration in head and neck cancer: Interdisciplinary perceptions of collaboration with dietitians for dehydration management in a community-based cancer centre.

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**Introduction:** Effective interdisciplinary collaboration (IC) with dietitians for head and neck cancer (HNC) patients undergoing radiotherapy in community-based cancer-services would help support best outcomes for this vulnerable group. Dehydration within this population is a common cause of unplanned presentations and admissions (UPAs) to hospital and cancer centres. The role of the dietitian in managing a patients' hydration is poorly described, yet could be central to lowering HNC outpatient UPAs.

**Objectives:** To explore interdisciplinary team perceptions of collaboration with the dietitian for dehydration management of HNC outpatients.

**Method:** Individual in-depth, semi-structured interviews were undertaken with an interdisciplinary team involved in the care of HNC outpatients undergoing radiotherapy in one community-based, cancer-service in Australia. These interviews were digitally recorded, transcribed verbatim and analysed using a grounded theory approach in Nvivo.

**Results:** Five dietitians, six radiation oncologists, two speech-pathologists and two clinical nurse consultants participated and described the importance of effective IC with dietitians for dehydration management of HNC outpatients treated in community-based cancer-services. They recognised that this was influenced at four levels and comprised of eight key themes: Personal (communication, patient self-management capacity, relationships); Professional (interdisciplinary respect, role delineation, years of experience); Culture (collaborative goal: prevent dehydration), System and Structure (accessibility).

**Conclusions:** Interdisciplinary HNC teams recognise the important role of the dietitian in identifying dehydration, and the need to collaboratively prioritise adequate hydration within this vulnerable group to prevent related UPAs. These exploratory findings provide insight into defining primary outcomes that dietitians need to focus on for HNC outpatients. Future research should investigate strategies for monitoring and maintaining hydration status of HNC patients undergoing radiotherapy in community-based cancer-services.