The Southampton Mealtime Assistance Roll-out Trial (SMART): Feasibility and Acceptability of Implementing Trained Volunteer Mealtime Assistants Across Southampton General Hospital

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Background
- Malnutrition is common in older inpatients: 26% of patients aged over 65 admitted to hospital are at risk of malnutrition\(^1\)
- Malnourished patients in hospital have an increased risk of infections and pressure ulcers, as well as a longer hospital stay and increased mortality\(^2\)
- Multiple behavioural factors contribute to inadequate nutrition in hospital inpatients\(^3\) (Figure 1)

Study Objectives
- To assess the feasibility and acceptability of implementing volunteer mealtime assistants across a large teaching hospital
- To assess food choice and dietary intake of older hospital inpatients and identify any changes after the introduction of volunteers

Methods
- Volunteers will be introduced in five departments of Southampton General Hospital (Figure 2)
- Volunteers are recruited through the voluntary services manager and undergo a half day training session and a 1-1 competency assessment prior to being allowed to work independently
- Feasibility will be assessed by collecting data on recruitment, training and activity of volunteers
- Acceptability will be assessed through interviews with patients and relatives and focus groups with nursing staff and volunteers
- 50 patients will be recruited in each department and characterised
- Food choice and dietary intake will be measured by weighing individual patients’ food waste and nutritional intake calculated using manufacturer’s portion sizes and nutritional information

Preliminary Results
- Volunteers have been introduced in the first four departments
- 84 volunteers have attended training and 48 have completed the 1-1 assessment
- 203 patients have been recruited to characterise the 5 departments
- Baseline food choice and dietary intake has been measured in all 5 departments
- Further data collection and analysis is ongoing; recruitment will finish in 2015 and the study will report later in 2016

Conclusions
- Malnutrition in hospital is a common and important problem among older patients in hospital
- The Southampton Mealtime Assistance Roll-out Trial will assess the feasibility and acceptability of introducing volunteer mealtime assistants in 5 departments of Southampton General Hospital
- This is the first study to assess the use of volunteers on such a large scale

References:

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