

Dietetic Professionals PD Pathway

- Accredited Practising Dietitians play a key role in the care of patients with cancer across the continuum of care.
- Accredited Practising Dietitians practise in a variety of cancer care and palliative care settings. Find out how some Australian dietitians have developed their careers in these different settings.
- Professional development opportunities are available through a range of avenues, including workplace-based learning, self-directed learning, workshops and seminars, short courses, professional networks, conferences and postgraduate qualifications.

Where are you in your career

▶ New to cancer care

If you are new to cancer care, you will probably want to start with activities that will provide you with general information about cancer, its diagnosis and treatment. Gaining experience in a broad range of areas may help you not only in your understanding of the needs of patients with cancer but also in your decisions about future career directions.

Tips from Dietetic professionals

▶ Find a mentor

A mentor can be a great source of advice and support.

"As part of becoming an accredited practising dietitian you have to have a relationship for a year with a mentor – I chose my supervisor at work. As I got into the role I could see how valuable this was. So I actively sought other mentors based on their level of expertise in an area and their reputation as being good at fostering up and coming young practitioners."

(Liz, Clinical Research Fellow, QLD)

"Talk to the people who know more than you about specific areas – call that mentoring, whether formal or informal – that's a really big one, it's really important."

(Steve, Public Health, WA)

"It's really important that someone starting out finds someone who's knowledgeable and enthusiastic and can help lead them to some good resources and good opportunities for them."

(Wendy, Senior Dietitian, QLD)

Mentors can be Accredited Practising Dietitians or other health professionals working in cancer care.

"I've been really lucky... one of the senior dietitians here... She did a lot for the unit in those first couple of years setting up nutrition services and I was working under her then which was fantastic, having a mentor there."

(Jodie, Paediatric Dietitian, VIC)

"Linking in with that (international trial) I did a Research Masters so then I had a supervisor in the hospital who was interested in cancer and I had university supervisors, and I had the people around the world who were involved in the trial."

(Wendy, Senior Dietitian, QLD)

"I was able to find somebody in the university setting who had a real passion for evidence-based practice and the nutrition component of caring for people with cancer."

(Wendy, Senior Dietitian, QLD)

Mentors can help you develop your career, as well as answer clinical questions that you may have.

"Because I'm so passionate about nutrition for children with cancer, because I just love it, it's really fun to share that with other dietitians... to train them and watch them produce pieces of work is just fantastic."

(Jodie, Paediatric Dietitian, VIC)

Many health services have formal mentoring programs. If you are having difficulties finding a mentor, try contacting relevant interest groups or organisations.

The Dietitians Association of Australia can assist you in finding an appropriate mentor through the Oncology Interest Group. [Click here](#) for more tips on finding a mentor.

► Broaden your general skills and work in different cancer environments

Having a broad background can help you deal with the breadth of patient groups and diseases within cancer care.

"Looking back on it, rotating (out of oncology and into other units) was the best thing I could have done because it's important to get skills in some other units.... Gave me some really important skills for coming back into oncology."

(Jodie, Paediatric Dietitian, VIC)

"Get any paediatric experience to get started with. You need good paediatric skills to be able to apply them to the treatment protocols."

(Jodie, Paediatric Dietitian, VIC)

"Having reasonably strong clinical and community knowledge is an important part of public health... community programs and clinical interventions are important parts of the public health continuum..."

(Steve, Public Health, WA)

Exposure to a range of areas and service delivery settings can be helpful, for example, oncology wards, chemotherapy day units, palliative care services or transplantation etc.

"Get a really broad perspective early on of that whole continuum of care. So you might be working on a medical oncology ward, you really want to search out some options of looking at what the surgical process is like, what the outpatient process is like, what the radiation oncology process is like. There are all these different things that the one patient might go through..."

(Wendy, Senior Dietitian, QLD)

Having a broad background and more life experience may also help you cope with emotional demands of working in cancer care.

► Trial a short-term role in cancer services and talk to people

Spending some time in cancer care can help you decide whether this area of dietetics might be for you. This can be possible with a hospital rotation, by arranging informal visits with an Accredited Practising Dietitian in cancer care, or by enrolling in a formal site visit program.

"I didn't have a yearning to be working in oncology... it was more a fortuitous thing... I didn't have much sense of what oncology dietetic work would be until I tried it..."

(Wendy, Senior Dietitian, QLD)

"Look for placement opportunities in a range of different areas, such as the placements available through the PEPA program to gain experience in the palliative care field."

(Wendy, Senior Dietitian, QLD)

Talking to others who work in your chosen field can help you decide whether it might be for you.

"(If you're interested in working in public health in cancer), the first step is to talk to people who work in the area – public health generally or public health in cancer specifically. It's a wonderful area to work in, but it's not for everybody. In clinical dietetics, you may only see someone a few times and help with their recovery – the feedback and reward is a lot more instantaneous ... in public health ... the timeframes we deal in are in the order of months and years and decades..."

(Steve, Public Health, WA)

► Self-directed learning on cancer terminology

In addition to clinical expertise, Accredited Practising Dietitians working in the area need to have an understanding of the different types of cancer decisions and the cancer journeys experienced by patients.

"It's important to understand the entire treatment process patients are going through and how that affects the rest of their lives as well. That's really important when you're talking to people about food – food is a huge part of our lives... For example, people having radiotherapy every day, can spend 2 or 3 hours of every day travelling and having treatment, which can interfere with their mealtimes and their ability to prepare food."

(Nicole, Senior Dietitian, VIC)

"It's really important to be compassionate... have some understanding of what patients are facing and take this

into consideration during your interventions."

(Nicole, Senior Dietitian, VIC)

Options may include cancer text books and cancer websites. Ask others what they have found helpful.

"There was new information to pick up in terms of the medical side of things like procedures and chemotherapy regimens etc. I found myself a few good text books and asked nurses on the wards and other more experienced oncology dietitians about general medical texts. The American Dietetic Association also has some really good cancer nutrition resources."

(Liz, Clinical Research Fellow, QLD)

If relevant to your work, you may also need to learn about research.

"I remember at the beginning being a little bit overwhelmed by the thought of the statistics side of things. There are various nursing and allied health books which talk about research as part of practice and I found them much more practical and easy to understand than some of the pure statistics books which can be quite overwhelming when you haven't done any study in the area."

(Liz, Clinical Research Fellow, QLD)

You may find that information designed for patients is easier to digest when you first start learning.

Good introductory cancer websites can be found in our section on [Fundamentals of Oncology](#) For more information on self directed learning, [click here](#).

▶ **Introductory workshops/seminars**

Workshops and seminars may be available through a range of avenues. The Dietitians Association of Australia conducts workshops and seminars on a range of topics that may be appropriate.

Ask colleagues about local talks being given in your hospital or local area. The Cancer Councils in each state and territory often run workshop and seminars on a range of cancer topics.

For more information, [click here](#).

"The QLD Allied Health Professional Oncology Group (The Cancer Council QLD) – they have all sorts of seminars that dietitians may be interested in attending, where they can expand knowledge about different aspects of cancer care."

(Wendy, Senior Dietitian, QLD)

▶ **Cancer teams**

Multidisciplinary care is becoming a fundamental part of the delivery of best practice in cancer care.

"Learn about the roles of all the members of the cancer care team."

(Wendy, Senior Dietitian, QLD)

Being a member of a multidisciplinary team can be a valuable source of information and can provide ongoing learning opportunities.

"If you can, get into a really good team – the team of people you work with is really important, including the other clinicians you're working with. A good team is one where people listen to each other, work well together, focus on the patients care in multidisciplinary sense, and are willing to talk to each other about the patient care. As a dietitian working in oncology, you learn a lot from those other people."

(Nicole, Senior Dietitian, VIC)

Attending ward rounds, attending multidisciplinary meetings and discussing patients with other health professionals all provide valuable learning opportunities.

"I found attending ward rounds and multidisciplinary meetings absolutely invaluable in learning about cancer, the different types of cancer, the treatments and the reasons behind the decisions that the medical team or other professionals make and how that impacts on the way they manage the patients. It really gives you a perspective outside your own profession."

(Nicole, Senior Dietitian, VIC)

"Just chatting... When I go to review patients, I'll always make the effort to go via the nursing coordinators office. I'll stick my head in and say hi. So I'll have a chat with whoever is in there, about the patients I'm seeing."

(Jodie, Paediatric Dietitian, VIC)

"Discuss the cases with other professionals. So, if you're involved in seeing a patient who is also seeing a physiotherapist or a social worker, actually talking to them about the issues so you're learning about the whole

patient and what is going on with them. This is important because it can impact on the decisions you make about their nutritional management."

(Nicole, Senior Dietitian, VIC)

"If I have an issue with a patient, I'll normally call the nurse coordinator rather than try to sort it with it myself. Likewise with doctors – I'll always try and deal with the consultant because they're ultimately controlling the course of treatment... once you've got that relationship, it makes things much easier"

(Jodie, Paediatric Dietitian, VIC)

Involvement in multidisciplinary teams may not be possible for some dietitians, particularly those in private practice. Developing your own networks with clinicians in other disciplines is therefore particularly important.

To access the Cancer Learning Multidisciplinary Toolkit, [click here](#).

▶ Interest groups and organisations

Involvement in local, state-based, national or international networks or special interest groups can be a valuable source of information, ongoing learning and support. For example, the Clinical Oncological Society of Australia (COSA) and the Dietitians Association of Australia have interest groups. Ask colleagues about local groups.

"You need to network. If paediatric oncology is something you really want to get into, get in contact with someone like myself, so I can point them in the right direction to get started... Call the DAA or the Royal Children's Hospital as a starting point."

(Jodie, Paediatric Dietitian, VIC)

"With the help of the other dietitians in the department, I re-established the oncology interest group for dietitians in Victoria when I started working in oncology. That was a really important way for me to learn and network with other dietitians and find out what work dietitians were doing in other hospitals, so we could share ideas and work collaboratively as well."

(Nicole, Senior Dietitian, VIC)

"Our local Integrated Cancer Service can be a useful information source. They recently held a supportive care conference and are a source of funding you can apply to for projects and research activities."

(Nicole, Senior Dietitian, VIC)

For more information about national and international groups, [click here](#).

▶ Taking the next step

If you are considering working in a cancer-specific role, you will benefit from building your cancer-related knowledge and practice-based experience. This may involve attending courses and conferences, undertaking self-directed learning, getting involved in professional networks and groups, and pursuing opportunities to work in cancer care services within or outside your workplace.

Tips from Dietetic professionals

▶ Build your experience

Seek and take advantage of all opportunities as they arise. Make your interest known within your workplace, talk with other dietitians working in the cancer area, attend conferences, accept a position with rotations in cancer care, or seek opportunities outside your current workplace.

"I had the opportunity to be a site coordinator for a multi-centre trial doing a nutrition intervention study in advanced cancer. I took that opportunity and from there on I started to learn a whole lot more about cancer and then it became really interesting."

(Wendy, Senior Dietitian, QLD)

"Seek out opportunities to join interest groups and be involved in resource development and other projects."

(Wendy, Senior Dietitian, QLD)

"Just going to as much as you possibly can in terms of professional development... it's about being in and amongst it... public health is about networking, so say yes to as much as possible to start with."

(Steve, Public Health, WA)

"You really don't know what something's going to be like until to give it a try...some things can be really unexpectedly satisfying."

(Wendy, Senior Dietitian, QLD)

Identify the type of cancer care experience you want.

"Get a good sense of the areas that you might be interested in working in. You don't actually know until you actually have a look at it. You might be surprised that you're really interested in an area you hadn't previously been aware of."

(Wendy, Senior Dietitian, QLD)

Build your practice-based experience, with guidance from more experienced dietitians.

"Learning about cancer and cancer treatment – a lot of it is time and work experience on the job"

(Jodie, Paediatric Dietitian, VIC)

"I was lucky to work along side other dietitians who were doing their PhD in similar aspects of cancer care. That meant I had colleagues that I could bounce ideas off and they were also enthusiastic."

(Wendy, Senior Dietitian, QLD)

"I was lucky in that the manager of my department was very proactive in terms of supporting research. She really encouraged me to start very simple projects as part of everyday practice – just thinking about a question and collecting data. I also had some statistical support to help me write them up."

(Liz, Clinical Research Fellow, QLD)

Opportunities may present in other ways, such as becoming involved in projects or research.

"A person wanting to start in cancer care could contact the chair person and offer to help update one of the NEMO (Nutrition Education Materials Online) resources or develop a new one they've identified a need for. Finding a quality activity or resource development project that you can participate in that helps create networks as well as develop skills in that area."

(Wendy, Senior Dietitian, QLD)

▶ Get involved in networks and groups

Involvement in local, state-based, national or international networks or special interest groups can be a valuable source of information and ongoing learning.

"Find the first professional development opportunity and go to it, to get yourself into those networks – when you do get an email with an invitation – whether to an event or a website – it's about clicking on it and having a look."

(Steve, Public Health, WA)

At a national level, the oncology interest group of the Dietitians Association of Australia has an email discussion group that can be particularly helpful for dietitians new to cancer care.

"Join the oncology interest group – an email group where you can post questions and ideas ... the main idea is to provide advice and opportunity for new dietitians to ask questions about clinical situations they haven't come across and seek support in what to do with patient cases, so it's a great support."

(Nicole, Senior Dietitian, VIC)

"The oncology interest group is largely an email discussion group around oncology issues, plus there are often events advertised."

(Steve, Public Health, WA)

Becoming a member of COSA and its new Nutrition Group also provides opportunities for networking with others.

"If you are absolutely passionate about cancer care and know cancer care is the area you want to go into, then I'd suggest you join COSA and the COSA nutrition group."

(Wendy, Senior Dietitian, QLD)

"I've recently joined COSA – I would definitely recommend that for any new dietitian working in oncology... it's a good source of information, and we've recently established a nutrition sub-group that will be another source of support... particularly support for research and projects and professional development within oncology."

(Nicole, Senior Dietitian, VIC)

Additional networks may be found within organisations or other specialised groups.

"One of the great things about the Cancer Council is that we've got our own network – we've got a national nutrition and physical activity committee that has representatives from each of the state Cancer Councils and the Cancer Council Australia which gives us peer support and opportunities for mentoring both across the states but

also within our own state."
(Steve, Public Health, WA)

"We're trying to set up a national paediatric oncology group for dietitians linked in with the Australian and New Zealand Children's Haematology/Oncology Group – we've got each others names and emails, and hopefully we can start some regular contact. But we do bounce a lot of questions around – so I get a lot of emails from people."

(Jodie, Paediatric Dietitian, VIC)

Universities can also provide useful networks and support.

"It can be very useful to be aligned with a university. Often they run day courses, summer courses and refreshers. Even if you're not undertaking a formal postgraduate qualification, if you can get yourself associated with a university through in an adjunct role, it gives you access to the libraries and databases which can be a real advantage."

(Liz, Clinical Research Fellow, QLD)

"Quite often universities need to identify placements for students in 5- or 10-week projects and students can be very helpful for data collection. So it's important to be creative about linking in to other support systems."

(Liz, Clinical Research Fellow, QLD)

Becoming actively involved in networks and organisations provides additional opportunities for learning, networking and becoming involved in research or other projects.

"The QLD Allied Health Oncology Group (The Cancer Council QLD) also gives dietitians an opportunity to present... these sorts of groups are ways for you to get knowledge but you can also offer to help develop resources and provide presentations."

(Wendy, Senior Dietitian, QLD)

For more information about national and international groups, [click here](#).

There are many local interest groups. Ask colleagues about local groups.

▶ Attend conferences

Attendance at relevant state-based, national or international conferences can be helpful for building both knowledge and networks. For conference listings, [click here](#).

"Conferences are useful to hear what people are doing and to find out about the cutting edge stuff. But they're also invaluable for meeting people, networking and potential research collaborations."

(Liz, Clinical Research Fellow, QLD)

"Attending things like the Australian and New Zealand Children's Haematology/Oncology Group meeting is fantastic because you attend it with the pharmacist, the social worker, the nurse coordinator, the doctors. You all go there together, so you're getting updated from the oncology point of you. And then you apply your nutrition skills to it."

(Jodie, Paediatric Dietitian, VIC)

"Particularly when people go to conferences early in their career, they see presentations and think 'I do that' – it's a good validation and reinforcement of what they're doing in their job... and it gives you an opportunity to see other disciplines and often you'll find that there are parallels between your work and theirs."

(Steve, Public Health, WA)

"I went to the Australian and New Zealand Children's Haematology/Oncology Group meeting and that's probably the most useful networking opportunity we have as dietitians working in paediatric oncology."

(Jodie, Paediatric Dietitian, VIC)

"I've noticed the profile of nutrition grow... for example, whereas previously the Head and Neck Society conference would have been medically dominated, there are numerous disciplines attending these conferences now and presenting ... demonstrating the significance of their contribution to patient care... they are also a good avenue for professional development and networking."

(Nicole, Senior Dietitian, VIC)

"I would never have considered attending an overseas conference when I first started. But since doing my PhD I've attended a couple of overseas conferences and I've found them really invaluable in terms of content and contacts."

(Liz, Clinical Research Fellow, QLD)

"The American Dietetic Association conference gave me the opportunity to speak with the oncologist who helped developed the main nutrition assessment tool that we use now. That was a really good opportunity to sit down and ask some of the questions I had about the use of the tool. To meet an oncologist with their main focus as nutrition was very inspiring too."

(Wendy, Senior Dietitian, QLD)

▶ Attend workshops and short courses

Workshops and courses can help you develop networks as well as expertise. For more information about cancer-specific workshops and courses, [click here](#).

"We run a paediatric course here at the Royal Children's Hospital which is 2 blocks of 4 days. I've done that course and now I lecture at that course. That's quite an important course to give you some background in paediatrics... In terms of oncology, I ran a 1-day workshop here for paediatric dietitians around the country."

(Jodie, Paediatric Dietitian, VIC)

"Search out some training in management of grief and loss... such as the multidisciplinary workshops run by Queensland Health."

(Wendy, Senior Dietitian, QLD)

"I found the Advanced Statistics Course really useful – it helped with my reading and interpretation of research papers and meant that I had a better understanding of the quality of the research and whether the tests that had been conducted were appropriate."

(Liz, Clinical Research Fellow, QLD)

▶ Undertake self-directed learning in your area of interest

Once you have a general understanding of cancer, the next step is to build detailed, specific knowledge.

"It's very important that you know all the existing the guidelines – for example, the DAA guidelines and also those though the European Society of Parenteral and Enteral Nutrition (oncology guidelines)."

(Wendy, Senior Dietitian, QLD)

"Keep up to date, be aware of new treatments and how those new treatments could affect nutrient intake."

(Wendy, Senior Dietitian, QLD)

"Evidence-based guidelines are useful for keeping up to date with best practice and are also useful for practitioners who are new to the area or specialising in the area because they have all the latest references."

(Liz, Clinical Research Fellow, QLD)

Talking with other dietitians and specialists in other disciplines is a good way to build your knowledge.

"I talk to people. I think that can be really underrated – going to things and talking to people"

(Steve, Public Health, WA)

"For me, it's not so much the paediatric nutrition side of things that I need to work on, but how to apply that to the protocols. I've found the best way to do that is to keep up the networking within the Children's Cancer Centre. So, attend meetings regularly, have a good relationship with the nursing care coordinators and the doctors so that I can learn about protocols as they change."

(Jodie, Paediatric Dietitian, VIC)

"Talking to other dietitians, you often hear about articles that they've found or they've read. At conferences, in most presentations, people will refer to articles and references, so you can pick up relevant information without having to sit at your computer and scan through journals yourself if you lack time."

(Nicole, Senior Dietitian, VIC)

"Go to a person who knows a lot about the issue you're interested in, and they can help link you with resources – it could be a dietitian or it could be a nurse or other health professional."

(Wendy, Senior Dietitian, QLD)

"I've been quite lucky in that I'm working in a hospital that is purely a cancer hospital, so every other dietitian I'm working with is also working in oncology. We have a fairly unique team environment where we share patient care and have the opportunity to talk to each other about the patient cases and discuss what we've done and what we should do. There's a lot of peer support."

(Nicole, Senior Dietitian, VIC)

"Finding people who are more senior that you trust and you feel safe to ask those kind of questions – what does that stand for, what does that mean? If you go in with a fairly clear intention that you're there to have a conversation and to learn, people are pretty good about giving you their time."
(Steve, Public Health, WA)

Regular monitoring of the evidence is also helpful.

"For a few key journals that I'm interested in I get the contents page sent to me every week or so. Plus I have a few searches set up for key authors I know in the area and topics I'm interested in."
(Liz, Clinical Research Fellow, QLD)

"Become familiar with the journals that are most likely to have articles that are related to the area that you're working in."
(Nicole, Senior Dietitian, VIC)

"I tend to try and focus my professional development on the area I'm working in. At the moment it's head and neck cancer. One of my priorities would be identifying any gaps in my knowledge in the care of those patients and then seeking out information in journals and published sources to fill those gaps. I also try to keep up to date with new evidence as it comes up."
(Nicole, Senior Dietitian, VIC)

"Review articles are particularly good for building your knowledge about cancer."
(Steve, Public Health, WA)

"There are probably a dozen journals that I regularly review the table of contents for."
(Steve, Public Health, WA)

A range of sources of information are available including websites, journals, textbooks, and interactive CD-ROMs. Clinical practice guidelines are available for a range of cancer types and the Dietitians Association of Australia has produced nutrition-specific guidelines. For more information, [click here](#).

► Think about training in general skills

In addition to your cancer skills and knowledge, you may also identify other general skills that will help you in your role. Training may include communication skills training, negotiation skills or presentation skills training.

For more information, [click here](#).

"In paediatric oncology you need to be quite assertive and clear on your goals. Because you're dealing with a medical team that isn't always pro- putting a nasal gastric tube down. You need to be able to stand your ground and say 'look, we know this is going to happen in a few weeks time, it needs to happen now, there can't be any negotiation about it'... we know that the child will not get through this treatment without a tube down their nose."
(Jodie, Paediatric Dietitian, VIC)

► Think about your own self-care

While rewarding, working in cancer care can also be challenging emotionally and psychologically. An important aspect of training for dietitians working in cancer care is self-care. To access a list of self-care resources, [click here](#).

"Especially for a younger person – who's just graduated recently, perhaps without a lot of life experience as yet – it would be really crucial to start picking up some tips and information about how people experience cancer, as well as how to support yourself when you're confronted with those emotional, sometimes very sad situations, and linked with that is ways to avoid burn out."
(Wendy, Senior Dietitian, QLD)

There are many strategies you can use to help you deal with the emotional and psychological stress of working in cancer care and to help avoid burn-out.

"There are a range of online sessions, workshops, and peer discussions that can help."
(Wendy, Senior Dietitian, QLD)

"Establish a support network. They may be other people in cancer, it could be other disciplines, it could be the allied health team working in the same area as you, or it could be a number of dietitians from other sites who are working in cancer, like the state interest group. Maybe work with them on a closer role, like a project, so you

develop those bonds. Make it more than just the name of someone you know; make it a real network."
(Wendy, Senior Dietitian, QLD)

▶ Advance practice

If you are working at or considering moving into an advanced role in cancer care, your professional development needs will be more specific.

Tips from Dietetic professionals

▶ Participate in research, projects and steering committees
Involvement in practice-based research, projects and steering committees can help build your expertise.

"As you become more confident with the clinical management of patients, you start to see where there are gaps in the service you're providing and gaps in the evidence for how you manage the patients, so you want to try and add to that knowledge, fill those gaps and improve the service that you're offering."
(Nicole, Senior Dietitian, VIC)

"Involvement on the steering committee to develop evidence based guidelines – gave me a great deal of satisfaction to see something produced at the end... enjoyable to work alongside those other colleagues... and I know because I'm working along side this group of people, it confirms... 'yes, I'm providing best practice'."
(Wendy, Senior Dietitian, QLD)

"Here at Peter Mac we're in the process of putting together a resource manual for dietitians working in oncology."
(Nicole, Senior Dietitian, VIC)

"At the moment I'm really trying to push for research. In Australia we're not really doing any good research in oncology nutrition and children... If I keep pushing to submit research projects, once you've got one up and running you're forced to do the lit review, do the research, present at conferences..."
(Jodie, Paediatric Dietitian, VIC)

"I don't have to seek much professional development because of the environment I'm working in. There are always things going on here. For example: I had to do a literature review for the research proposal I submitted today, and then there was the conference in May, the nutrition symposium day I organised, and then later this year I'll be presenting some work to all the consultants (huge preparation will have to go into that), and then I'll be lecturing at the paediatric course (I'll have to update my lit review for that)."
(Jodie, Paediatric Dietitian, VIC)

"What's really valuable is doing some media work because that allows you to condense messages right down. It teaches you to read journal articles and come out with one or two key messages."
(Steve, Public Health, WA)

Involvement in research can also help build your networks

"Being involved in research... I met people interested in cancer from a whole range of perspectives and who knew potential new advances for what could be done dietetically... I had great supervisors – in the hospital and in the university – it gave me a wider perspective for what was possible."
(Wendy, Senior Dietitian, QLD)

▶ Give presentations or get involved in organising relevant state-based or national conferences
Giving presentations at national and international conferences can help you learn while also sharing knowledge with others. Being involved in the organising committees for conferences can be rewarding and can help you develop new networks. For conference listings, [click here](#).

"I presented at COSA last year and I'm hoping to present at the Head and Neck Society conference next year...if you put a lot of work into a research project, and you have an outcome that might change the way other people manage their patients, then there's a satisfaction there in being able to communicate that to other dietitians and other professional groups."
(Nicole, Senior Dietitian, VIC)

▶ Case studies

Find out what dietitians do in cancer care, what they enjoy about their work, and how they have built their careers in cancer care:

Tips from Dietetic professionals

▶ Jodie Bartle, paediatric dietitian, the Royal Children's Hospital, Melbourne

Role	<p>Senior paediatric dietitian in the Children's Cancer Centre at the Royal Children's Hospital Melbourne, with responsibility for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ clinical workload with children having bone marrow transplants ▶ overseeing the work of other dietitians in the unit ▶ project work, managing the nutrition component of the PICS project (Paediatric Integrated Cancer Service) which aims to streamline cancer services state-wide.
Links	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Paediatric dietetics ▶ Bone marrow transplants
Why like it?	<p><i>"It is a really rewarding job. Working with kids is fantastic, I'm so lucky... Parents get really hung up on food – they feel like the one thing they should be able to do for their children is to feed them. And when they can't, that gets incredibly stressful. So to be able to help them through that, the feeling that gives you is awesome. The fact that you've made a difference to someone's life and you've improved their quality of life... That means more to me than anything. Having a job where I can make a difference is huge."</i></p> <p><i>"I think I'm a real number cruncher. I was instantly attracted to oncology because it's a lot about learning the oncology protocols and the chemo they get and then making sure the patient continues to grow during treatment... Just to maintain the weight isn't enough, you've got to keep them growing during treatment. I love that challenge."</i></p>
Pathway	<p>Has worked at the Royal Children's Hospital for 12 years, since starting as a new graduate, although has concurrently gained additional experience in sports nutrition, private practice, research, and as a Director of the Dietitians Association of Australia While at the Royal Children's Hospital, worked for five years before being asked to rotate other units including gastroenterology, neonatal, intensive care</p> <p>The opportunity to return to oncology arose when returning to work from parental leave. At the same time she was also successful with the funding submission for the PICS project</p>
Training and courses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ 8-day paediatric dietetics course at the Royal Children's Hospital ▶ Undergraduate dietetics degree
Groups and networks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Dietitians Association of Australia (DAA) oncology interest group ▶ Currently trying to establish a national paediatric oncology dietitians interest group, to be linked in with the Australian and New Zealand Children's Oncology Group
What helps?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Having some general experience working with adults before starting in paediatrics ▶ Having a mentor ▶ Networking ▶ Attending conferences, particularly the Australian and New Zealand Children's Haematology/Oncology Group conference ▶ Presenting at conferences ▶ Having a thorough, up-to-date knowledge of treatment protocols ▶ Regularly attending multidisciplinary meetings ▶ Having good relationships with other multidisciplinary team members ▶ Corridor conversations with other team members ▶ Undertaking research <p><i>"Ultimately, if I can improve nutrition services to these families, then that's going to give me more satisfaction than anything"</i></p>

▶ Liz Isenring, clinical research fellow specialising in nutrition for older adults

<p>Role</p>	<p>NHMRC Australian Clinical Research Fellow</p> <p>Institute of Health and Biomedical Innovation (IHBI), School of Public Health (SPH), Queensland University of Technology (QUT)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 4-year research-only position specialising in nutrition for older adults including patients with cancer and their carers • Research is exploring nutrition screening and assessment outcomes and nutrition interventions <p><i>"Most of my research is clinically oriented so during data collection I spend a couple of days a week having patient contact, which means I still get to keep my clinical skills up to date while participating in research."</i></p>
<p>Pathway</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Graduated in 1998 • Worked as a clinical dietitian on a range of wards • Developed a particular interest in roles on oncology wards and day units • Took a role managing nutritional care of oncology wards • Undertook a number of small research projects as part of clinical practice and developed an interest in research <p><i>"As I gained experience I started to identify areas in which I thought we could do better and so that's how my interest started in research – it raised a lot of questions for me."</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PhD and subsequent postdoctoral research role <i>"During my PhD I made it a point to do various things – media training and Toastmasters. The media always wants things in succinct sound-bites – but to try and explain the research you've been doing for the past 3 years in one or two sentences can be quite challenging! So that was really useful."</i>
<p>Training and courses</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bachelor of Health Science (Nutrition and Dietetics) • PhD examining nutrition intervention in patients receiving radiotherapy; involved a number of courses: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Advanced Information Retrieval Systems ○ Advanced Statistics course • Self-directed learning • Media training/Toastmasters
<p>Groups and networks</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Oncology Interest Group of the Dietitians Association of Australia <p><i>"They have a listserv so you can send out questions – it's quite widely used and very useful."</i></p>
<p>What helps?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Find a mentor • Be aware of available resources (text books, websites, journal e-alerts, evidence-based guidelines etc); talk to colleagues about what is useful • Build in research as part of everyday practice <p><i>"I often hear people say that in theory research would be nice but there's not enough time. We're all overworked and there's never going to be enough time for research unless you're in a research-only position. But there are some very simple things you can do to formulate a simple question and then collect or record the information in a way that it can be analysed and written up."</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify and build collaborations <p><i>"There are often trials that are happening and it would be easy to add a couple of simple nutrition questions that provide useful nutrition information."</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Align yourself with a university • Attend conferences (national and international) • Be creative about available support systems <p><i>"Quite often universities need to identify placements for students in 5-or 10-week</i></p>

	<p><i>projects and students can be very helpful for data collection. So it's important to be creative about linking in to other support systems."</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Publish or perish! • <i>"It's really important to write things up and get it out there. If you do some research – publish it so people know about all the good work that's been happening."</i>
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► Nicole Kiss, senior dietitian, head and neck cancer patients, the Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre, Melbourne

Role	<p>Senior dietitian at a large Cancer Centre in Melbourne with responsibility for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • clinical leadership, facilitate effective professional development of staff, quality activities, and education as part of departments senior team • patient management of clinical specialty – head and neck cancer • research and service development – examples include establishing and piloting a dietitian-led clinic for head and neck cancer patients during radiotherapy treatment; and research in nutritional support for patients having peripheral stem cell transplant.
Links	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Head and neck cancer • Haematology
The positives	<p><i>"I like the fact that it is very specialised. It's nice to be focussed on particular areas."</i></p>
Pathway	<p>As a new graduate, gained experience in a range of locum and part time roles in paediatrics, diabetes, general medicine, aged care and oncology</p> <p><i>"In those first two years I covered quite a few clinical areas and realised I really enjoyed oncology, so when the opportunity arose at Peter Mac for me to have a full time role, I jumped at it."</i></p> <p>Has been at the Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre for ten years, with experience in the chemotherapy day unit, gastrointestinal cancer, haematology and most recently head and neck cancer</p>
Training and courses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Postgraduate studies in clinical research and health services management • Undergraduate degree in dietetics
Groups and networks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dietitians Association of Australia (DAA) oncology interest group • Dietitians Association of Australia (DAA) research interest group • COSA • Previously established and belonged to a local dietitians' oncology interest group
What helps?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mentoring • Peer support • Attending ward rounds and multidisciplinary meetings • Attending conferences, such as those run by COSA, Australasian Society of Parenteral and Enteral Nutrition, Australian and New Zealand Head and Neck Society • Presenting at conferences • Running seminars for other dietitians working in oncology • Developing a resource manual for dietitians working in oncology • Accessing information and support through the local Integrated Cancer Service • Scanning journals and electronic tables of contents • Reviewing evidence • Involvement in research <p><i>"There are still so many areas that haven't been studied and there's a lot of research that still needs to take place. Being specialised in a particular area means you can really see what needs to be done and you can dedicate some time to doing those things"</i></p>

▶ Steve Pratt has a dietetics and sports science background, manages public health programs at the Cancer Council WA

Role	Manager, Cancer Smart (public health programs), Cancer Council WA Programs include: bowel cancer screening program, women's cancer program, general practice education project and WA Healthy Business
Links	Public health and survivorship
Why like it?	<i>"When you have wins in public health, you're potentially changing the lives of the whole population"</i>
Pathway	Background as a public health nutritionist, particularly in aboriginal health Spent a couple of years working in public health (not cancer-specific) before starting at the Cancer Council WA <i>"I think with anybody's career there is a degree of serendipity...to finish university and to end up where you thought you'd end up is quite unlikely, particularly with dietetics... my interest in cancer evolved alongside my position here... it started as a more general public health interest, and then I moved into a more cancer-specific public health interest"</i>
Training and courses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Currently enrolled in a PhD, researching exercise and its effect on prostate cancer recovery • Accredited Practising Dietitian (APD) • Accredited Exercise Physiologist (AEP) • Postgraduate diploma (dietetics) • Postgraduate certificate (food technology) • BSc (nutrition) • BSc (human movement)
Groups and networks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Member, Dietitians Association of Australia (DAA) • Member, Australian Association for Exercise and Sports Science (AAESS) • Chair, DAA Oncology Interest Group (national) • Chair, DAA WA Branch
What helps?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mentoring • Talking with people, networking, building relationships • Getting involved, saying 'yes' to as much as possible • Attending events run for a whole range of professionals • Browsing journals to build your own knowledge • Regularly monitoring and reviewing evidence • Attending conferences across a range of topics including dietetics, health promotion, public health, behavioural research, exercise science • Doing media work

▶ Wendy Davidson, senior dietitian in cancer care, the Princess Alexandra Hospital, Brisbane

Role	Senior dietitian at a large tertiary hospital in Brisbane, with responsibility for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • management of a team of dietitians working across cancer care • clinical work with patients with head and neck cancer
Links	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Head and neck cancer • Evidence-based practice

Why like it?	<p><i>"What changed for me was the growing awareness that working in cancer care wasn't just seeing sick patients who were inpatients, having chemo and vomiting (where I thought 'what can I do to help?')"</i></p> <p><i>"Being able to talk with people in the profession and other disciplines who are really keen, really enthusiastic about nutrition... that made it click for me, made (working in cancer care) much more appealing for me"</i></p>
Pathway	<p>Began with a science background before training to become a dietitian.</p> <p>Worked for many years in clinical dietetics within an acute hospital setting, with some exposure to cancer care</p> <p>Became involved in cancer care ten years ago by chance, when offered a role as site coordinator for a multi-centre trial doing a nutrition intervention study in advanced cancer.</p>
Training and courses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Completed a Research Masters, linked through work as site coordinator for the multi-centre trial in advanced cancer • Management courses run by Queensland Health and the hospital • Master of Applied Science (Research) • Graduate Diploma in Nutrition and Dietetics • Bachelor of Science
Groups and networks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dietitians Association of Australia (DAA) oncology interest group • COSA • Member of a steering committee (with collegiate network established through involvement in multi-centre trial and Research Masters) to develop evidence based guidelines for the nutritional management of cancer cachexia and for the nutrition management for patients receiving radiation therapy
What helps?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Having a mentor • Peer support with dietitians and other clinicians • Being involved in groups and networks • Seeking opportunities • Setting learning goals using the structured professional development planning of the Accredited Practicing Dietitians program • Obtaining copies of nutrition assessment tools • Reviewing evidence • Having a thorough knowledge of treatment guidelines • Using the American Dietetic Association evidence analysis library to examine literature behind answers to clinical questions • Attending conferences such as those run by COSA and the Australian and New Zealand Head and Neck Society, Australasian Society of Parenteral and Enteral Nutrition • Presenting at conferences • Being involved in projects and research

Conference/event listings

▶ Australian

COSA

<http://www.cosa.org.au/asm.html>

Australasian Society of Parenteral and Enteral Nutrition Annual Scientific meeting

<http://www.auspen.org.au/>

Australian and New Zealand Head and Neck Society

<http://www.anzhns.org>

Palliative Care Australia

<http://www.palliativecare.org.au>

Australian and New Zealand Children's Haematology/Oncology Group

<http://anzchog.org/>

▶ International

American Dietetic Association

<http://www.eatright.org/>

MASCC (the Multinational Association for Supportive Care in Cancer)/ ISOO Symposium on Supportive Care in Cancer

<http://www.mascc.org/>

ASCO (the American Society of Clinical Oncology)

<http://www.asco.org/ASCOv2/Meetings>

ASH (American Society of Haematology)

<http://www.hematology.org/meetings/>

San Antonio Breast Cancer Symposium

<http://www.sabcs.org/>

Organisations and networks

▶ Australian

The Dietitians Association of Australia (DAA)

<http://www.daa.asn.au/>

COSA Nutrition Group

<http://www.cosa.org.au/groups/nutrition.html>

Australasian Society of Parenteral and Enteral Nutrition

<http://www.auspen.org.au/>

Australian and New Zealand Children's Haematology/Oncology Group

<http://anzchog.org/>

▶ International

American Dietetic Association

<http://www.eatright.org/>

Courses and workshops

▶ Postgraduate qualifications

At present there are no specific postgraduate qualifications available in Australia for dietitians specialising in cancer. However you may choose to focus research-based degrees in the area of cancer care, through a Masters degree or a PhD.

▶ Workshops/seminars

The Cancer Council WA

Professional Development Program

<http://www.cancerwa.asn.au/professionals/>

The Cancer Council Queensland

Allied Health Professionals Oncology Group Forums

http://www.cancerqld.org.au/page/Need_support/Education_Programs/AHPOG

The Cancer Council Victoria

Short courses in Victoria on:

- Breast Health
 - Communication
 - Sexuality and cancer
 - Living with cancer facilitator education
- http://www.cancervic.org.au/about-cancer/for-health-professionals/training_courses_and_education

▶ General skills

National Breast and Ovarian Cancer Centre

<http://www.nbocc.org.au/health-professionals/clinical-best-practice/communication-skills>

Communication skills

Self-directed learning

▶ Australian

Cancer Learning

<http://www.cancerlearning.gov.au/>

Interactive learning modules on:

- Multidisciplinary care
- Psychosocial care

Links to cancer education resources across a broad range of areas.

EdCaN learning resources

Case studies: http://www.cancerlearning.gov.au/edcan_resources/#/xml/module_3/casestudies/

Supporting modules:

- [The cancer journey and domains of specialist cancer nursing practice](#)
- [Population health concepts in cancer control](#)
- [The biology of cancer](#)
- [Cancer treatments:](#)
 - - Fundamentals of cancer surgery
 - - Fundamentals of radiotherapy for cancer
 - - Fundamentals of systemic cancer therapies
 - - Fundamentals of cancer biological and molecular targeted therapies
 - - Fundamentals of haematopoietic stem cell transplant
- [Supportive care](#)
- Culture-centred approach in cancer control for Indigenous Australians - coming soon

Dietitians Association of Australia

<http://www.daa.asn.au/index.asp?pageID=2145846452>

Evidence based guidelines for the nutritional management of cancer cachexia and Evidence based guidelines for the nutritional management of patients receiving radiation therapy (access for members only)

The Cancer Council NSW

<http://www.cancercouncil.com.au/editorial.asp?pageid=671>

Resources on:

- Cancer awareness (for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Workers)
- Talking about sexuality, body image and cancer
- Managing cancer pain

Clinician's Health Channel

<http://www.health.vic.gov.au/clinicians/>

For health professionals in Victoria – provided by the Department of Human Services

Cancer Institute eviQ Treatments Online

<https://www.eviq.org.au/>

Queensland Health NEMO (Nutrition Education Materials Online) patient information materials

<http://www.health.qld.gov.au/nutrition/>

Patient information materials relevant to oncology

▶ International

American Dietetic Association Evidence Analysis Library

<http://www.adaevidencelibrary.com/>

USA based website that aims to synthesis nutritional research about dietetic practice questions

- The Clinical Guide to Oncology Nutrition (developed by the American Dietetic Association)

American Dietetic Association publication: The Clinical Guide to Oncology Nutrition, Second Edition

<http://www.eatright.org/Shop/Product.aspx?id=5043>

National Cancer Institute

<http://www.cancer.gov/>

USA based website – includes information for consumers and health professionals about different cancers and treatment options, including complementary medicines.

British Columbia Cancer Agency

<http://www.bccancer.bc.ca/default.htm>

Canadian based website – includes information for consumers and health professionals, including management protocols by disease state.

National Comprehensive Cancer Network

<http://www.nccn.org/>

USA based website that includes clinical guidelines for cancer treatment.

Multinational Association for the Supportive Care in Cancer

<http://www.mascc.org/>

International multidisciplinary website includes links to clinical practice guidelines in supportive care.

Grants/fellowships/scholarships

▶ Australian

Cancer Institute NSW – education scholarships

http://www.cancerinstitute.org.au/cancer_inst/profes/scholarships.html

COSA

fellowships, grants and awards available for members

<http://www.cosa.org.au/about-us/general-grants.html>

The Cancer Council Queensland

Allied Health Professional Oncology Group Continuing Education Grants

http://www.cancerqld.org.au/page/need_support/education_programs/Health_Professional_Grants/

Victorian Cancer Agency

supportive care research grants, fellowships and scholarships <http://www.victoriancanceragency.org.au>

Check hospitals/area health services for local grant availability

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