

MALNUTRITION IN THE ELDERLY: IDENTIFYING AND SIGNPOSTING WITH THE PAPERWEIGHT ARMBAND



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Kirstine is part of a team that is pioneering the PaperWeight Armband - a non-medical, non-intrusive tool that is helping health and social care professionals to identify people at risk of malnutrition and signpost them to information and advice.

The idea stemmed from being part of a 12-month national pilot programme set up by the Malnutrition Taskforce. The vision was to demonstrate an integrated approach to dealing with malnutrition; aligning health and social care and the voluntary sector. Now, thanks to a partnership with Age UK Salford, the PaperWeight Armband is set to be rolled out across the country to help save lives and cut costs associated to treating the condition - with a simple strip of paper.

There has never been a more urgent need for healthcare providers and commissioners to act and address the problem of malnutrition. Needless suffering, neglect and inconsistent standards of dignity are unacceptable. Malnutrition is a major cause and consequence of poor health and older people are particularly vulnerable. It is a condition that frequently goes undiagnosed and untreated, with one in 10 older people suffering from, or at risk of, malnutrition. This equates to around one million older people in the UK and more than one in three are malnourished, or at risk of malnourishment on admission to hospital.

Not only is this intolerable from a health perspective for the quality of life in older people, malnutrition can lead to more hospital admissions and re-admissions, longer hospital stays and greater healthcare needs, which means the cost of malnutrition can spiral out of control.

Here in Salford, we have an unashamedly ambitious aim. We wish

to ensure that we work in collaboration with health and social care and the voluntary sector to remain committed to ensuring high standards of nutritional care and equal access across the city. The challenge was how to go about this and our journey with the PaperWeight Armband started in 2013, when Salford was chosen as one of six pilot sites to be part of a Malnutrition Prevention Programme for 12 months. We looked at current services, support and prevention tools available and gained views from members of the public and health and social care professionals through a nutrition committee set up by the integrated care programme 'Salford Together'. It was concluded that we wanted to establish a non-intrusive, non-medical intervention solution that healthcare providers and the voluntary sector would be able to implement quickly and easily into their practice. The PaperWeight Armband was born out of this.

PILOTING THE PAPERWEIGHT ARMBAND

Age UK Salford supported the case for a simple signposting tool, as there was not one currently available to help carers, healthcare or social care professionals in broaching the subject of malnutrition. A public engagement exercise with older adults, who thought it was normal to lose weight in later life, also revealed that some did not want to be weighed.

Age UK Salford went on to pilot the PaperWeight Armband with support ▶

Kirstine specialises in intestinal failure on the national unit at Salford Royal. She has extensive clinical experience, specifically in the management of short bowel syndrome and home parenteral nutrition.

workers using it on home visits. They were able to measure the upper arm of a service user with the simple strip of paper and, if it was able to slide up and down easily, then there was a high risk of malnutrition, as it was likely that their BMI was less than 20kg/m². The charity Age UK was then able to provide further information, advice and support and the results were really positive, with service users gaining weight, making improvements to their diet, and enjoying cooking and eating again.

When the national Malnutrition Prevention Programme ended in March 2015, it was agreed by the nutrition committee that there was a strong commitment to continue this work to roll-out the PaperWeight Armband and Age UK Salford have partnered with us to make this happen. The PaperWeight Armband was launched at Food Matters Live 2015 and now, alongside this signposting tool, there is a supporting handbook, nutrition booklet and e-learning resources on malnutrition and dysphagia.

ADVICE AND GUIDANCE

The aim of the PaperWeight Armband package is to identify the risk of malnutrition and in turn help to reduce unscheduled admissions to the acute hospital of those identified with malnutrition in the population, make improvements in weight without the need for formal medical intervention, increase the proportion of older people who feel supported to manage their own conditions and improving the quality of life for service users and carers. This simple signposting tool that comes with a wealth of information, aligns a shared vision we have with Age UK, of a world in which older people flourish; a world in which older people have the opportunity to live healthier, longer lives and to enjoy a sense of wellbeing while maintaining choice and independence.

The PaperWeight Armband is lightweight, can be easily stored and transported and complies with infection control guidelines for single use only, as well as being easily recycled. There is a QR code on the armband so that it can be scanned to directly access the dietary leaflet on the Age UK Salford website that has proven to be invaluable to Salford health and social care professionals seeking 'food first' approaches to dealing with the risk of malnutrition. The guidance outlined



in the leaflet should be followed for a maximum of 12 weeks, following which time, if there is no improvement, the advice is to ask to see a healthcare professional. It can be used when scales and height charts are not available, when support workers are short on time with a whole day of scheduled visits or, if someone is reluctant to be measured, for example, a person with dementia.

CASE STUDIES

Case study evidence has shown how well the PaperWeight Armband works as a signposting tool and how it leads to further support. One woman was able to get back on her feet after the early intervention of the armband. The 91-year-old who lives alone, spent a period of time in hospital and the day after she was discharged, she was called by Age UK Salford's Hospital Discharge Aftercare and Reablement Service, who established that she was having difficulties with eating meals. During the initial home visit, discussions identified that she had lost a lot of weight and had no motivation to cook or eat well.

The Age UK Salford support worker used the PaperWeight Armband test, which identified that she was at risk of malnutrition. She was provided with the nutrition booklet, 'How to improve your food and drink intake if you have a poor appetite' and over the following eight weeks, the support worker visited her to encourage her to increase her nutritional intake. At the end of the eight-week period, she had gained 4kg in weight, was making home cooked meals two or three times

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a week and went out with her friend regularly, including a lunch group. The woman reported improved confidence; reduced attendance at her GP; more independence and a renewed interest in food and nutrition again.

Another case study has also shown how well the PaperWeight Armband and supporting information works to help fight malnutrition. A 65-year-old man with learning difficulties had lost weight unintentionally, which was noticed by his carers. It was established that his housemates were on a weight-reducing regimen, therefore, the communal food in the fridge, such as milk, butter and cheese, had been changed to low-fat varieties and sugar had been replaced with an artificial sweetener. His carers sought advice from Age UK Salford and then used the PaperWeight Armband to establish that he was at risk, then simple changes were made with help from the nutrition booklet. This resulted in him gaining 7kg in weight over a 12-month period and he also started to enjoy his food again.

These two examples not only show how quick and easy the PaperWeight Armband is to use, it also shows how effective it is as a non-medical, non-intrusive tool that is a starting point to help health- and social care professionals - as well as family carers - fight malnutrition.

JOINED-UP CARE AT SALFORD

As a vanguard site, Salford Royal NHS Foundation Trust is set to be at the forefront of a national health revolution that will bring home care, mental health and community nursing, hospital and out-of-hospital services together, ushering in a new era of joined-up care. Together, we believe that prevention and treatment of malnutrition should be integral to ensure that older people can live more independent, fulfilling lives.

The hope now is that the hard work that Salford has pioneered to help fight malnutrition will spearhead an integrated approach to dealing with it, helping to save lives and reducing costs

- all starting with a simple strip of paper. The armbands can be bought by healthcare providers in packs, along with the handbook, nutrition booklets and a poster that can be displayed in a workplace to show it is being used. For more information on the PaperWeight Armband and to view a short video on the background to the product development, go to the following link. www.ageuk.org.uk/salford where you can also register for more information and a starter pack.

TOP TIPS FOR SERVICE USERS TO IMPROVE INTAKE

(Taken from the PaperWeight Armband supporting booklet: *How to improve your food and drink intake if you have a poor appetite*)

- Have small regular meals and snacks in between.
- Try to eat something every two to three hours, even if it is only something small.
- Have puddings or desserts at least once a day, if you are too full after a meal, wait 30 minutes.
- Alcohol in small amounts can stimulate an appetite, but it is important to check with a doctor or chemist if taking any medication.
- If you smoke, try not to smoke in the half hour before a meal.
- Getting a small amount of fresh air before meals can help to stimulate an appetite.
- Take drinks after meals rather than before or with to avoid feeling too full or bloated.
- Make the most of 'good days' or times during the day when you feel more like eating.
- Enriched nutritional drinks, for example, Complan and Build Up, are available to buy from chemists and supermarkets and are available in a wide-range of preparations, including flavoured drinks and soups.
- If after four weeks of trying some of the suggestions to your diet, you are still concerned or losing weight, contact your GP practice. ■