Beginning tube feeding can be a difficult time for patients and their families, emotionally and practically. Patients and carers need to take in a lot of information about enteral feeding in particular and, in some cases, their disease or condition more generally. They may be nervous about using the pump; they may worry that they will not be able to deal with problems that might arise with the pump or the tube. On top of this, tube feeding can disrupt both the routine of the patient and the family, as well as potentially causing some complications for the carer.

With the best of intentions, NHS teams in primary and secondary care rarely have sufficient time to sit down and discuss enteral feeding in detail with patients and carers. However, as the second in our series of case studies illustrates, Nutricia’s Enteral Nurse Specialists offer the support and training that patients and carers need to feel confident when tube feeding at home. “After training you can see that a weight has been lifted from their shoulders,” says Fiona Mullen, one of three Nutricia Enteral Nurse Specialists working as a team in Glasgow.

Fiona and her colleagues manage a wide range of patients with diverse conditions and different needs. “Head and neck cancer, motor neurone disease and genetic diseases account for most of our case load,” she says. “But whatever the condition or the patient’s circumstances, we aim to help people remain as independent as possible by providing an appropriate level of training.”

**An excellent working relationship with the NHS**

Fiona regards close collaboration with her colleagues in the NHS as the cornerstone of the Nutricia team’s success. Once a NHS team decides that a patient requires tube feeding, dietitians and nutrition nurses refer patients and their full-time carers to Fiona’s team. “Nutricia’s service is well-established in Glasgow,” Fiona says. “Over the years, we’ve developed an excellent working relationship with the NHS staff and we have regular meetings with our colleagues in the hospitals. The NHS staff know that if they give a referral we will see the patient within 48 hours. They also know that we will inform them if we identify any issues the NHS team should be aware of.”

**The Nutricia Homeward Nursing Service Case Study Series**

Keeping you up-to-date on the benefits of the Nutricia Homeward Nursing Service to patients, carers and the NHS by minimising tube-related readmissions into hospital, helping to keep as many patients as possible safely managed at home.
Nutricia’s close-knit team of Enteral Nurse Specialists in Glasgow works together to ensure that patients at the city’s ten hospitals are seen within 48 hours. “If one of us is in one hospital it is logical that we see all the cases in that area, rather than travel across the city,” Fiona says. The close relationship with the NHS staff also means that the Nutricia team knows which referrals are urgent and which are less critical. “This allows each patient to get the support they need when they need it,” Fiona remarks.

Time to speak to patients

“NHS staff are, unfortunately, usually too busy to sit down with patients and their families and speak to them to understand their concerns, feelings and uncertainties about tube feeding,” Fiona says. “We have a lot more time to spend with patients than the NHS staff. So, we can discuss patients’ individual issues, answer their questions and offer more in-depth training.”

Because they are able to spend longer focusing on the practical aspects of managing tube feeding with patients and carers than their NHS colleagues, the Nutricia team also has more opportunities to pick up any issues that may hinder effective tube feeding and identify solutions. For example, poor dexterity, cognitive problems and sensory impairment can all complicate enteral feeding. “If the person can’t hear the alarm, we can arrange a pager,” Fiona explains. “If a patient isn’t physically able to open the pump or is worried about coping if the alarm goes off during the night, then overnight feeding may not be appropriate. Many people, especially the elderly, prefer to have support around them when tube feeding.”

Varied training needs

Given the range of patients that Fiona supports, their training needs are, unsurprisingly, very varied. During discharge training, Fiona begins with a basic introduction to the pump and tube feeding, and explains the role of the Nutricia Homeward Enteral Nurse Specialist Careline. Using this introduction as a foundation, she adapts the training to the needs of each patient and their carers. “An average training session lasts about 45 minutes,” Fiona says. “However, if the patient or their carer is nervous about home feeding, the session may last 1.5 hours. I leave only after I’m sure the patient will be able to cope and manage with their feeding at home either independently or with a level of support from, for example, carers or district nurses.”

Patients and carers find that the Homeward Enteral Nurse Specialist Careline provides reassuring support. “They know help is available if and when they need it.” Fiona says. “Most patients and carers are initially nervous about tube feeding. But once they see what’s involved very few have any major issues with the pump or feeding generally.”

Regular follow up

Most patients, or their carers, can successfully manage tube feeding after a training session held with the Nutricia team before the patient is discharged from hospital. However, about a third of patients need a follow up appointment from the Nutricia team once they are back at home. In addition, the team arranges a routine follow up at least once a year, with some patients potentially requiring a more regular follow up either by phone or in person. “Being able to rely on the Nutricia team for follow up helps district nurses and other members of the NHS community team cope with their increasing workload,” Fiona remarks.

“The Nutricia team becomes the first point of contact for the community team when a patient has a problem,” Fiona says. “District nurses may not have the time or expertise to help. We work with the community team and patients to help avoid the need for a patient to go to A&E if they experience difficulties with their tube or feeding.”

All this means that Fiona finds her role professionally rewarding. “As a nurse, you want to spend time with patients and their families to really understand their issues and find solutions to their problems,” she concludes. “It’s really rewarding to see very nervous patients or carers leave training feeling a lot more confident with tube feeding.”

For further information visit: www.nutricia.co.uk