

Careers for Dietitians in Patient Care –hospital setting

Lisa Barker

I graduated from Deakin University in 2002 and have been working in clinical dietetics ever since. I began working in a medium sized hospital where I gained experience in many different clinical areas (including Intensive Care, Surgery and Medicine) and research. I then worked in the UK also in Intensive Care and Renal Nutrition, and then started at the Royal Melbourne Hospital (RMH), where I specialised in gastrointestinal surgery and research. I am currently completing a PhD titled “Malnutrition – significance, prevalence and impact on the hospitalised surgical patient” and working at RMH supervising student dietitians on clinical placement.



Interview

What is the role of a dietitian in patient care?

A dietitian in patient care is responsible for the nutrition of patients through ensuring optimal hospital food and providing therapeutic diets, nutritional supplement drinks, enteral nutrition (tube feeding), parenteral nutrition (via a drip) and education. Patients with different medical conditions have different nutritional requirements, and along with the health care team (doctors, nurses and other allied health members) dietitians provide support and education to assist with recovery and management of illness and the promotion of health.

Where does a dietitian work dealing with patients?

Dietitians work with both inpatients (patients in hospital) and outpatients (those who attend for appointments) in both public and private hospitals and rehabilitation settings.

What experience and qualifications do you need to work as a dietitian in patient care?

To be a Clinical Dietitian in a hospital setting you need to complete a degree in Nutrition and Dietetics. Many dietitians working in hospitals are also members of the Dietitians Association of Australia and are Accredited Practising Dietitians.

What are the highlights?

I really enjoy working as part of a team. Working in a hospital, I am part of the health care team – I attend ward rounds, meetings and clinics with other team members and meaningfully contribute to improving the health of my patients. I also enjoy working with student dietitians and doing research as it is my way to contribute something back to the profession.

Advice for students who are interested in working in patient care?

Make the most of your clinical placement – read up on clinical conditions and the role nutrition plays in their management and show your supervisors your enthusiasm and ability to learn.