

# Nutrition

## TO IMPROVE OUTCOMES

### Malnutrition in Hospitalized Patients: Results of an AMSN Survey

Evidence reveals that 1 out of 3 hospitalized patients are malnourished upon admission. Without prompt identification and treatment, even more become malnourished throughout the hospitalization, leading to increased complications and delayed recovery. Nursing involvement in battling malnutrition is paramount to helping patients recover faster and more fully. As such, the “Nutrition to Improve Outcomes” column was developed to help you better understand the scope of malnutrition, keys to identification, and treatment strategies that can safely be used to target the problem of nutritional imbalances. We hope that you will find the column informative, but more so, that you will use it to enhance the care of hospitalized patients.

Data reveals that approximately 30% of patients arrive at the hospital malnourished (Barker, Gout, & Crowe, 2011; Somanchi, Tao, & Mullin, 2011). Malnourished patients are at risk for a host of complications including infections, falls, and delayed healing (Barker et al., 2011; Somanchi et al., 2011). As nurses, we are in key positions to effectively identify and promptly treat these patients. However, we cannot manage this enormous patient care challenge alone. Acknowledging the need to collaborate, AMSN is joining with other professional organizations to target best practices in reducing malnutrition in hospitalized patients. As we embark on this venture, we want to understand our current level of engagement in and understanding of nutrition practices. To that end, a survey was sent to AMSN members in November 2012. We were very impressed with the response rate. Over 475 inpatient nurses participated in the survey. The results are very positive, and some are particularly notable.

In Question #1 (see Figure 1), when asked, “How often do you assess your patient’s nutritional status?” the majority (60.8%) reported “every shift,” with several others (26.8%) reporting “every day.” This is astonishing when we consider that the Joint Commission requirement is to screen all patients on admission. It appears that several AMSN members assess much more frequently. Outstanding!

In Question #2 (see Figure 2), when asked, “What communication strategies do you use to discuss your patient’s nutritional status with the health care team?” we saw a wide variety of methods. It was especially interesting to see that 26.3% are incorporating nutrition discussions in team huddles. How great that this new communication strategy is being used to tackle the important issue of nutrition!

Figure 1.  
Responses to Question #1

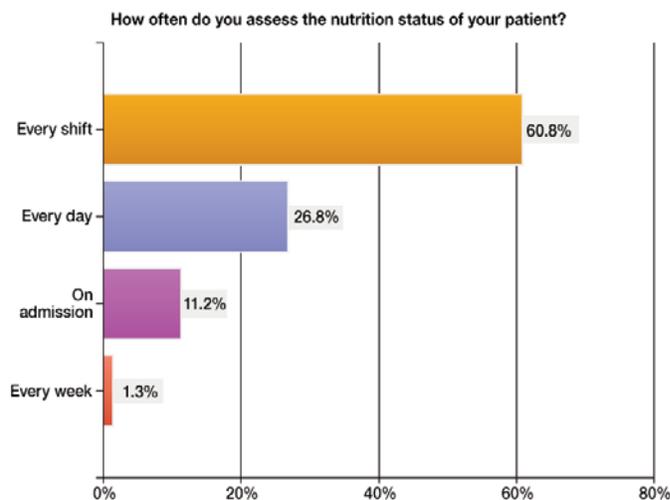


Figure 2.  
Responses to Question #2

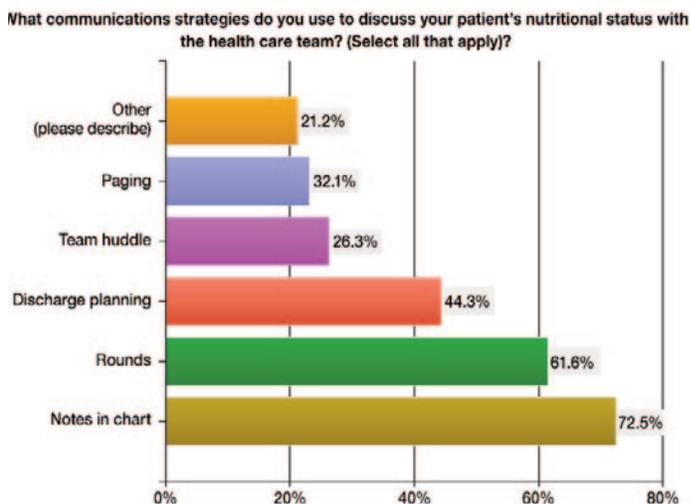
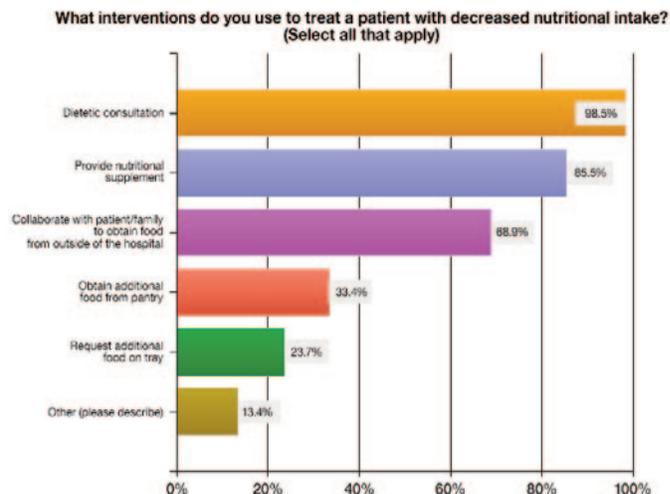
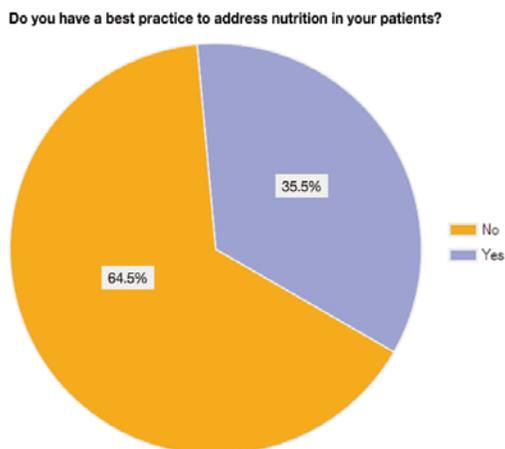


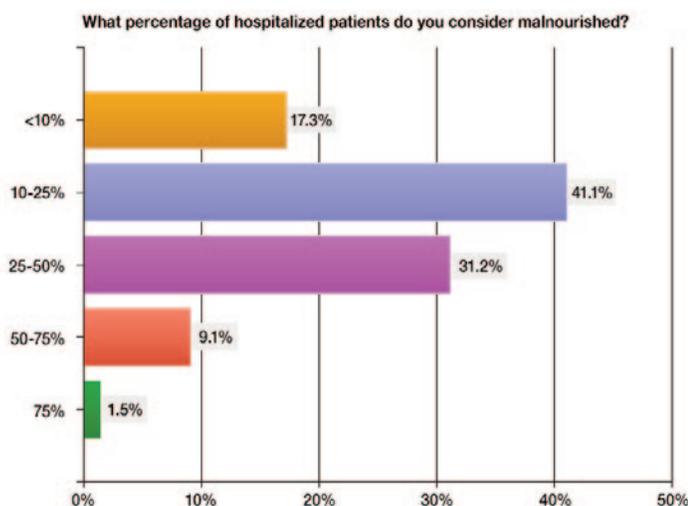
Figure 3.  
Responses to Question #3



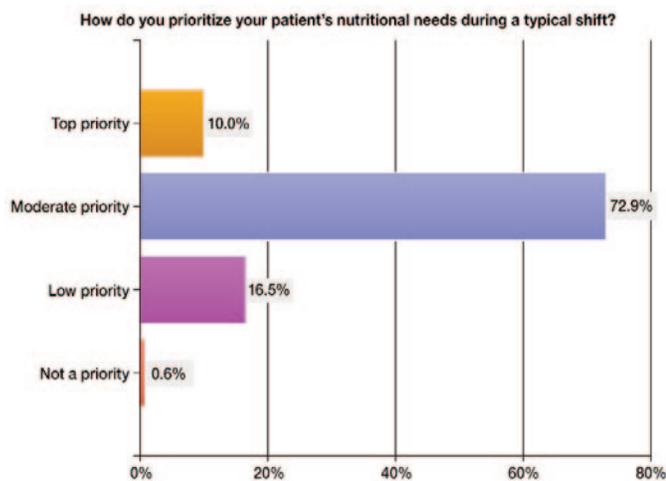
**Figure 4.**  
**Responses to Question #4**



**Figure 5.**  
**Responses to Question #5**



**Figure 6.**  
**Responses to Question #6**



In Question #3 (see Figure 3), when asked, “What interventions do you use to treat a patient with decreased nutritional intake?” almost everyone (98.5%) responded that they consult a dietician. This collaborative step is essential if we are going to effectively tackle the issues of malnutrition. Keep it up! Impressively, many of you also directly intervene by obtaining oral supplements and working with families to obtain favorite foods. These are key interventions that we hope will continue.

In Question #4 (see Figure 4), the majority (64.5%) responded that they did not have a best practice strategy. Through our partnership with other professional organizations, we will be sharing and establishing best practices that address malnutrition and positively influence patient outcomes. We hope that you will work to implement these strategies.

In Question #5 (see Figure 5), most respondents underestimated the percentage of patients suffering from malnutrition. As cited above, approximately 30% of patients are malnourished on admission. This number is shocking. Yet, the number could increase during hospitalization if nutritional imbalances are not promptly and consistently addressed. By implementing effective care plans, we can take an active role in decreasing the number of patients afflicted with malnutrition.

In Question #6 (see Figure 6), we were very proud to see that AMSN members place such a high priority on nutrition. The vast majority (82.9%) listed nutrition as a moderate to high priority during a typical shift. Although it would be best if all of us placed nutrition at the top of the priority list, we are certainly starting from a strong position.

Again, we thank all of the nurses who took time out of their busy lives to complete the survey. Thank you. We look forward to sharing additional nutritional updates through this column in the coming year. Together, we will work to reduce the incidence of malnutrition in the hospitalized patient and improve patient outcomes.

**References**

Barker, L.A., Gout, B.S., & Crowe, T.C. (2011). Hospital malnutrition: Prevalence, identification and impact on patients and the healthcare system. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 8(2), 514-527.

Somanchi, M., Tao, X., & Mullin, G.E. (2011). The facilitated early enteral and dietary management effectiveness trial in hospitalized patients with malnutrition. *Journal of Parenteral and Enteral Nutrition*, 35(2), 209-216.

**Beth Quatrara, DNP, RN, CMSRN, ACNS-BC**, is Clinical Nurse Specialist-Advanced Practice Nurse 3, Director of PNSO Nursing Research Program, University of Virginia Health System. She is the “Nutrition to Improve Outcomes” Column Editor.

**Editor’s Note:** The author disclosed that she is a presenter for Abbott Nutrition.

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