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WORKING WITH PEOPLE AFFECTED BY CANCER – A MIXED METHODS EXPLORATION OF PRACTITIONER PERSPECTIVES IN NUTRITIONAL THERAPY.

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**Introduction** - Nutritional therapy (NT) is a bioscience-based branch of complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) with National Occupational Standards (NOS) and accredited training courses which include compulsory clinical training. Approximately 900 practitioners are registered with the voluntary regulator, the Complementary and Natural Healthcare Council (CNHC), but the number of unregulated practitioners is unknown.

Cancer is a leading cause of death worldwide; nutrition and lifestyle factors may affect recurrence and survival rates. Many cancer patients and survivors seek individualised advice on diet and use of supplements and appropriately skilled nutritional therapy practitioners (NTP) may be well-placed to safely provide this advice. Little is known of NTPs' perspectives on working with people affected by cancer; this study seeks to explore their views on training, use of evidence and other resources, to support the development of safe, evidence-based practice in this important clinical area.

**Methods** – An on-line anonymised questionnaire collected data from participants recruited from all UK registered NTPs. Recruitment was facilitated by the British Association for Applied Nutrition and Nutritional Therapy (BANT). Quantitative data on practitioner characteristics, years in practice, other therapies practiced and work with cancer clients were collected. Qualitative data on types of evidence used, barriers to practice and perceived training and support needs, when working with clients with cancer, were collected and analysed. SPSS was used to produce descriptive statistics.

**Preliminary Results** – 274/888 (31%) of registered NTPs responded. 61% had accredited NT qualifications and 80% also had other degree or higher qualifications. 35% respondents already work with cancer clients and a further 48% indicated they are willing to. Non-cancer practitioners (NCP) (%) typically requested specialist training and practice guidelines to start cancer work. Cancer practitioners (CP) rated searches of peer-reviewed literature as most useful for information to support practice, whereas commercial product information was rated least useful. CPs requested engagement with mainstream medicine, more access to research evidence and professional recognition to facilitate and support work with cancer clients. A need for professional networking, mentorship and/or supervision was noted in both groups of respondents, which is of interest since 81% all participants worked as sole practitioners exclusively or as part of their practice, <1% worked within the NHS.

**Discussion** – This is the first detailed documentation of NTP perspectives on cancer work and a number of areas have been identified for further detailed evidence to be collected. This work will inform and support the development of professional practice guidelines for NTP and inform the development of specialist training and other resources.

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