

NNNG Update



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Governing fluctuations, utility supply chain issues, a cost of living crisis and food bank demands are not just impacting the moral of healthcare professionals (HCPs) but the population at large. More young professionals are leaving their chosen discipline in search of greater opportunities and a better lifestyle. It's timely that our final column for 2022 reviews a British Dietetic Association (BDA) article titled 'Oxford to overseas: a dietetic adventure', which featured in the BDA's members' magazine *Dietetics Today*.

The article follows the personal and professional experience of Sarah-Jane Mattinson, a former Intestinal Rehabilitation Dietitian, who decided to take a leap of faith and leave behind her role in Oxford for a three-year placement on the island of St Helena – a British Overseas Territory – in the South Atlantic (<https://bit.ly/SJMBDA>).

Flights to St Helen are weekly, and supplies and food to the island arrive three-weekly via the good ship M.V Helena. Described as a small volcanic, sub-tropical island, on St Helena you can experience all weather conditions, from heavy rain to bright sunshine, within a few hours.

Sarah's office – St John's Villa – is shared with the OTs Health Promotion and Psychiatric Team. Sarah explained that there had not been a dietitian on the island for three years, with no retained dietetic services. Although, health promotion and dietetic care is definitely much needed. Current information indicates that 70% of adults are living with overweight or obesity, with approximately 1,000 living with type 2 diabetes (T2DM). There are nearly 400 pre-diabetics on the island. Anecdotally, figures indicate that nearly half the diabetic population have diagnosed hypertension and a large number of people are living with chronic kidney disease. There is much work to be done!

Food poverty does not have a precise definition, but can be summarised as the inability of individuals and households to obtain an adequate and nutritious diet in socially acceptable ways, or the uncertainty that they will be able to do so (see: <https://bit.ly/FSBDA>). Sarah quickly recognised that St Helena experienced a very brittle supply chain. Delays in the departure of the M.V Helena meant that fruit and vegetables were often left sweltering on the dock in South Africa and subsequently unsalable. Alternatives included frozen, dried or tinned fruit and vegetables, with many prepared in brine or syrup.

The average salary in the UK is ~£26,000 compared to St Helena, which is £8,000. A shop of fruit and vegetables cost £20.03 on the island. If you went to Aldi today, you could have the same shopping basket for a cost of just £5.86.

Sarah states that: *"To understand the eating habits of an island is to explore what is available on the island, providing a dietary evidence-base that is appropriate to the local community on St Helena."*

With high levels of obesity and T2DM on island, Sarah, understandably, is delighted to work with an enthusiastic Minister for Health, championing and encouraging a more responsible approach to improving individual lifestyles on St Helena.

Reinstating dietetic services on St Helena – What does this look like?

A referral pathway for GPs and other healthcare professionals has been instigated. Malnutrition is underdiagnosed on the island, so Sarah has implemented a series of 'Malnutrition Universal Screening Tool' ('MUST') training for HCPs and is keen to evaluate its effect and impact.

Other initiatives include:

- Providing a library of first-line dietetic advice leaflets
- Providing nutrition support for hospital in-patients with or without enteral feeding tubes
- Working alongside the island's diabetes nurse
- Forming part of a multidisciplinary team, trying to initiate a very low-calorie liquid diet for weight loss
- Attending oncology day cases
- Visiting the 44-bed community care home, 15-bed sheltered elderly accommodation, and the residential home for adults living with learning disabilities
- Attending a whole system approach for obesity workshop with other island stakeholders
- Linking in with the United Kingdom Overseas Territory Office for Health Improvement and Disparities
- Brainstorming via Microsoft Teams with Diabetes UK.

When Sarah is not working, she is of course enjoying island life! Nonetheless, CPD activity is never far away, and we were lucky to have Sarah join us for the 2022 NNNG Virtual Conference in July.

Want to find out more? Follow Sarah's adventure on Instagram: [@dietitian_and_the_saints](#) or Twitter: [@SMattinsonRD](#)

2023 content: The NNNG, plans to take its theme, 'Nutrition through a different lens' into 2023. If you have a personal nutrition adventure, blog, audit, innovation or service development – let the NNNG know, and we will feature it in this column. Contact us on the details below.

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