

A Five-Year Review of Dietetic Referral Activity in a Long-Term Residential Care Facility for Older Adults in Ireland: 2019 – 2023

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Introduction

Long term care (LTC) settings in Ireland have limited access to clinical nutrition services provided by CORU registered dietitians. HSE guidance for community dietetic service provision recommends one whole time equivalent (WTE) dietitian per 100 nursing home beds¹. HIQA standards advise all older persons in residential care facilities should receive adequate care to meet their nutritional needs². National guidance on nutrition screening recommends malnourished patients and those at risk of malnutrition, as per specific criteria, require referral to a dietitian to improve outcomes associated with malnutrition and associated disease³. The part-time dietetic service at LPH maintains activity records in-line with best practice to evaluate service needs. This review highlights the changes in dietetic referrals and service demands prior to, during and post the Covid-19 Pandemic, and reflects the increasing complexity in the LTC population.

Methods

Data extrapolated from excel spreadsheets was used to generate the summary table and graph depicting monthly and annual activity from 2019 – 2023. New referrals were defined as either new cases to the service, or returning residents who were re-referred due to a change in their medical condition or nutritional status. Residents not seen remained on the dietetic waiting list at year end, and these referral figures exclude residents reviewed at weekly Inter-Disciplinary- Team meetings and cancelled referrals.

Results

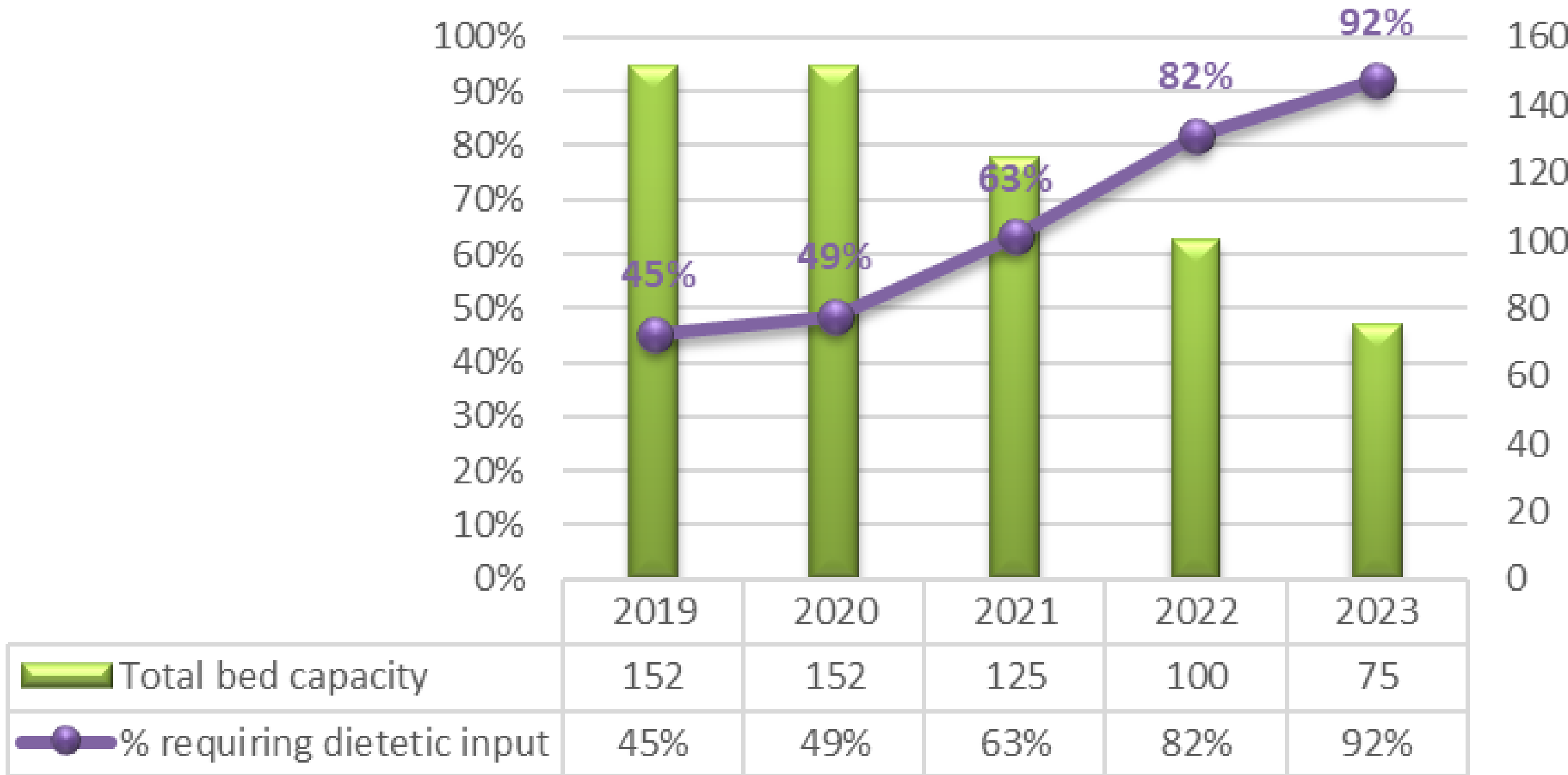
In 2019, a lower percentage of residents required dietetic input: 45% (69 out of 152 beds) compared to 92% (69 out of 75 beds) in 2023. Annual referrals increased from 133 in 2020 to 164 in 2022, then a decrease to 146 in 2023. The average caseload returned to pre-Covid rates in 2023, with 69 residents, compared to a higher caseload from 2020 to 2022, ranging from 74 to 82 residents. The dietetic waiting list increased by over 300% by year end 2023 compared to 2019.

Conclusions

The data indicates an increased need for nutritional referrals and monitoring of our residents. This supports the provision of at least 1 WTE dietitian per 100 nursing home beds, albeit this recommendation is dated prior to the Covid19 pandemic. This review also supports increased staffing levels for designated (nutritionally trained) care home staff to meet the nutritional needs of older persons in residential care.

Results Charts

% Residents referred dietetics -v- bed capacity



YEAR comparison	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
New referrals	112	133	148	164	146
Case Load monthly average	69	74	79	82	69
% increase year compared 2019	0	7	15	19	0
Total bed capacity	152	152	125	100	75
% residents requiring dietetic input	45%	49%	63%	82%	92%
WTE dietitian	0.45	0.6	0.66	0.6	0.68
Waiting List year end	5	18	2	15	21

*2019 = adjusted for 9months of cover

References

- 1) Nutritional Care in Health and Disease: proposed model of service delivery from community dietetics 2017 -2020. HSE 2016
- 2) National Standards for Residential Care Settings for Older People in Ireland. HIQA, 2016
- 3) National Clinical Guideline 22: Nutrition screening and use of oral nutrition supports for adults in the acute care setting. Department of Health, 2020

Acknowledgements

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