



Wessex INFORmED project launch

A new project is designed to empower dietitians and registered nutritionists in research

A new project designed to strengthen research engagement and evidence-based practice within the nutrition and dietetic workforce across Wessex has launched.

The INFORmED project officially launched on 21 October 2025 at the Novotel in Southampton, marking a significant milestone for dietitians and registered nutritionists (with the Association for Nutrition, associationfornutrition.org/), from across the region.

INFORmED – Improving Nutritional Outcomes for People across Wessex by Engaging Dietitians and Registered Nutritionists in Research – is a collaborative initiative under the Wessex Health Partners umbrella, co-led by University Hospital Southampton NHS Foundation Trust and Bournemouth University.

This project responds to the need to grow the workforce of research-ready dietitians and registered nutritionists to address the pressing nutritional priorities within the UK. Dietitians and registered nutritionists are vital to the ongoing need to address the evidence gaps in nutritional science and clinical practice. By connecting clinicians, academics, patients and communities, INFORmED aims to:

- Build a sustainable, inclusive network tackling key nutritional challenges
- Develop interdisciplinary research capacity led by underrepresented professions
- Support clinical academic careers for dietitians and registered nutritionists
- Address regional priorities such as obesity, malnutrition and young people's health

Caroline Anderson is from University Hospital Southampton, the University of Southampton and the Biomedical Research Centre Southampton.

Sarah Hillier is from Bournemouth University.

Irantzu Arregui-Fresneda is from Health Sciences University and University Hospitals Dorset.

Hazreen Majid is from Health Sciences University.

Jane Murphy is from Bournemouth University and The Adam Practice.

Emma Parsons is from the British Association of Parenteral and Enteral Nutrition (BAPEN), the University of Nottingham and the University of Southampton.

AT A GLANCE

Name: Wessex INFORmED project

Funded by: Wessex Health Partners wessexhealthpartners.org.uk/

Co-leads: Dr Caroline Anderson (University of Southampton) and Dr Sarah Hillier (Bournemouth University)

Steering Committee: Irantzu Arregui-Fresneda (Health Sciences University), Professor Lynn Calman (University of Southampton), Dr Caroline Childs (University of Southampton), Dr Judy Lawrence (BDA), Hazreen Majid (Health Sciences University), Professor Jane Murphy (The Adam Practice), Dr Carolina Paras (NIHR Research Delivery Network), Dr Emma Parsons (BAPEN), Dr Ravita Taheem (Southampton City Council), Dr Emily Walters (BAPEN, BDA), Rebecca Weekes (Queen Alexandra Hospital Portsmouth).

The launch event

The day brought together over 50 attendees, including dietitians, registered nutritionists, educators, managers, academics and industry representatives. The atmosphere was one of collaboration and optimism, with sessions designed to inspire and equip professionals at all stages of their research journeys

Morning highlights

Co-chaired by Dr Caroline Anderson and Dr Emma Parsons, the morning opened with a warm welcome and introduction to the Wessex Nutrition Research Network and INFORmED project.

Keynote presentations set the tone. BDA CEO Liz Stockley highlighted the importance of embedding

QI and research into the dietetic career pathway, reinforcing that research is not an optional extra but integral to professional development.

Dr Steve Wootton, from the University of Southampton, then explored the benefits of research engagement for workforce development, emphasising how QI and research activities enhance patient care and professional satisfaction by addressing nutritional problems.

The regional perspective followed, with Dr Claire Mander, Dr Carolina Paras and Professor Lynn Calman sharing practical insights on 'Getting Started in Research and Collaboration for Success.' This session resonated strongly with early-career professionals seeking guidance on navigating research opportunities.

Workshop 1 concluded the morning, focusing on training and collaboration needs assessment – a crucial step in shaping future support structures.

Afternoon engagement

The afternoon, co-chaired by Dr Sarah Hillier and Irantzu Arregui-Fresneda, began with reflections on the regional priorities survey, providing valuable insight into areas where research can have the greatest impact.

Three interactive workshops followed:

- Group A: Curious to Research – helping participants identify research questions within their practice and explore pathways to develop them into projects
- Group B: Experienced in Research – aligning existing project ideas with regional priorities for maximum relevance and impact
- Networking Pathway Next Steps – fostering connections and planning collaborative actions to sustain momentum

The event closed with Dr Sarah Hillier outlining strategies for network sustainability, ensuring that INFORmED is not a one-off initiative but a long-term driver of change.

Key takeaways

- Inclusivity and collaboration: INFORmED is designed for all grades of dietitians and registered

"We believe in research that stays grounded and informed by nutrition and dietetic practice and led by professionals who are passionate about improving care"

Dr Caroline Anderson, Co-lead INFORmED

"The INFORmED project highlights how education and research can intersect to empower dietitians and registered nutritionists. By fostering evidence-based practice and collaborative learning, it equips professionals with the skills and confidence to translate knowledge into improved health outcomes across the life course"

Dr Emma Parsons, BAPEN Education Officer

"Understanding regional priorities is the cornerstone of impactful research. The survey results provide a roadmap for aligning projects with real-world needs, ensuring that dietitians and nutritionists in Wessex focus their efforts where they can make the greatest difference to population health"

Dr Sarah Hillier, Bournemouth University, and Irantzu Arregui-Fresneda, Health Sciences University

nutritionists, from students to advanced practitioners, as well as educators, managers and industry partners

- Capacity building: The project will provide training, mentorship and networking opportunities to grow research capability in Wessex
- Shared vision: Improving nutritional health outcomes requires collective effort; INFORmED offers the platform to make this happen

Looking ahead

The launch event was more than a meeting – it was the start of a movement. By empowering dietitians and registered nutritionists to engage in research, INFORmED aims to transform practice, influence policy and ultimately improve lives and address health inequalities across Wessex.

For those unable to attend, resources and next steps will be shared via the Wessex Nutrition Research Network. Interested professionals are encouraged to join the network and contribute to shaping the future of nutrition research in the region.



CALL TO ACTION

- Join the Wessex Nutrition Research Network and INFORmED Project!
- Engage with the network's nutrition priorities and workstreams
- Who can join? Dietitians, registered nutritionists, educators, managers, academics, public health and anyone in the wider health and social care system who is passionate about improving nutritional health in Wessex
- Why join? Access research opportunities, training, mentorship and collaborative projects
- To get involved, email: caroline.anderson@uhs.nhs.uk
- Follow us on LinkedIn: Wessex Nutrition Research Network