

# HEADS UP...

**TOPIC: Nutritional Screening**

**SETTING: Behavioral Health Care (BHC) Programs**



## Why is this important?

Nutritional screening is the first step in identifying patients that are at high nutritional risk or have poor nutritional status. Nutrition-related issues that go undetected can result in problematic health conditions (e.g., malnutrition, eating disorders and obesity). It is essential that nutritional screenings are being performed when needed and conducted appropriately so that prevention or early intervention methods can be implemented. Insufficient nutritional screenings are frequently being cited in surveys.

## Scope of the problem:

Time period: **January 1, 2019 – December 31, 2019**

Number of full surveys performed: **1,164**

Number of surveys (in moderate to high risk SAFER categories) related to nutritional screening (**CTS.02.01.11 EP1**): **75 (6%)**

Observations identified within a specific topic area may reveal systemic areas for improvement across the organization. These opportunities for improvement might be reflected in other standards/EPs within the CTS chapter and/or other chapters/standards/EPs.

## Sample survey observations [from surveyor notes] (and contributing factors)

- The organization does not have a process to screen clients/individuals to determine need for a nutritional assessment.
- The organization does not have a method to identify screening triggers for initiating further assessment or referral.
- Nutritional screening completed at the time of admission did not contain all required elements such as decrease or increase in appetite, dental problems (other than difficulty in chewing), and/or eating habits or behaviors were not addressed in the assessment.
- Screening questions lacked specific details and do not adequately determine nutritional risk (e.g., does not include weight loss or gain of 10 pounds or more in the last three months nor behaviors that may indicate an eating disorders, other than only asking the question "do you have an eating disorder?").

## Potential contributing factors:

- Unclear policies or processes regarding nutritional screening, assessment, and/or referral
- Staff was not trained to identify triggers that indicate a need for nutritional assessment or referral
- staff was not properly trained to conduct nutritional screenings.
- Nutritional screening forms were outdated or incomplete (e.g., did not include questions related to dental health, food allergies or history of past eating disorders)
- Assessment did not include determination of the level of risk

## How to identify potential problems in your organization

### Review your policies and procedures

- Does the organization have a clearly defined process for identifying those for whom a nutritional assessment is indicated?
  - Is there a written procedure for staff to determine a referral for a nutritional assessment?
- Does organization have a designated nutritionist or dietician for referrals and/or consultation?
- Is education/training regarding a nutritional screening provided to staff?
- Does staff have a list of referral resources if the organization does not conduct nutritional assessment?

### Interview staff (e.g., clinicians and support staff)

- Does staff understand when and how to conduct a nutritional screening for whom a nutritional assessment is indicated?
- Can staff demonstrate knowledge of required items/elements of the nutritional screening?
- Can staff balance the need to move through the screening quickly with an understanding that the process is intended to gather information and documentation necessary for appropriate care, treatment and services?
- Do leaders provide appropriate oversight and ensure that nutritional screenings and clinical documentation are complete?

### Assess your environment

- Review the nutritional screening/assessment forms to ensure that essential nutritional history (including food allergies, weigh loss/gain, dental problems, and eating behaviors/habits) is thoroughly evaluated.
- Review the electronic health record to ensure that prompts and fields are equipped to collect the relevant documentation.
- Review competencies related to nutritional screening and assessment.

### Evaluate implementation

- Review a sample of individual records (e.g., via quarterly clinical chart review) to ensure that nutritional screenings/assessments were appropriately documented.
- Collect and analyze data to ensure that nutritional screenings are conducted when necessary.
- Use data to understand if improvements are needed to conduct appropriate screenings.
- Review the policy and procedures for nutritional screenings annually to ensure that the screening process is updated.

## What are some resources that can assist in mitigating risks in these areas?

- National Council on Aging (NCOA). Nutrition/Malnutrition Screening and Assessment Tools: <https://www.ncoa.org/assessments-tools/malnutrition-screening-assessment-tools/>