

Project 20 interviews

«Professionals speak about their daily work and their missions»

Interview with Madam Brigitte Trommer, dietician, in charge of the dietetic service at Robert Schuman Hospitals (HRS).

Brigitte Trommer, dietician, is in charge of the dietetic service at Robert Schuman Hospitals (HRS). The dietician is a specialist in nutrition, a professional in the paramedical sector whose mission is both preventive and curative. He or she prevents cardiovascular risks, avoids excess weight and teaches people to eat well.

Nowadays it is common for cancer patients to have a dietician, whereas in the past this service was reserved for patients suffering from diabetes, anorexia, bulimia, excessive weight gain and many others. Thanks to Brigitte and the dietetic team, who were involved in a thesis in dietetics, the importance of providing a dietician to a cancer patient has been underlined. This thesis was sent to Sandra Bachstein, breast care nurse, in order to ensure that every cancer patient undergoing chemotherapy or immunotherapy could have the right to the support of a dietician. Indeed, patients undergoing chemotherapy are often confronted with weight gain, due to the treatment itself and the cortisone administered. Knowing that excess weight is a real risk factor for recurrence in cancer, it is vital to monitor the patients.

At the beginning of treatment, the breast care nurse sends a request to the dietary department, and Brigitte Trommer will visit the patient for the first chemotherapy session. Following this first meeting some patients are sufficiently informed, while others prefer regular follow-ups. Supervision is adapted on a case-by-case basis.

Brigitte explains that her role is above all to make it clear to patients that they must never let themselves overeat. She advises them to eat in a balanced and healthy way, reducing quantities by not heaving second servings of food. She suggests having healthy snacks between meals (like tomatoes and cucumbers instead of sweets), eating soup if hunger persists after the meal, doing sports (sports groups adapted to the different diseases), going for a walk, moving around to increase metabolism, distracting oneself from remaining inactive in order to avoid eating sweets which are so bad for the health. Patients who have gained excess weight can become depressed and are highly motivated to change things. Unfortunately, tiredness (a side effect of the treatment) can add to inactivity.

Brigitte Trommer is willing to admit that nutrition is the only thing that we as individuals can control, as opposed to environment and genetics.

However even eating a healthy, balanced diet is no guarantee against cancer, but it can reduce risk. It is quite normal to have a sweet tooth, but people have to be conscious of what they are buying and consuming, because a healthy and balanced diet, based on seasonal and locally/regionally grown fruit and vegetables is best for our health. It is important to know that regional food that has not been subjected to long journeys, has not been exposed (or very little) to heat or light (two factors that reduce the vitamin C content, for example), gives it a higher nutritional value. If you then take the time to prepare a proper meal at home, you can be sure you are eating a healthy and balanced diet. By the way, vegetables that are frozen immediately after harvesting contain the highest nutritional value.

Personal message from Brigitte Trommer:

Patients should avoid diets that claim to cure cancer. Both during and after therapy, follow a healthy and balanced diet, do some exercise and avoid excessive weight gain. Do not leave out any one food group completely. A strict or restrictive diet is not good and can lead to malnutrition. Food supplements (concentrated extracts) can be counterproductive. Choose natural-based ingredients like fresh ginger and turmeric instead of ginger and turmeric in pill form. Consuming only natural food stuff is a real bonus to your health.



Thank you, Brigitte, for your invaluable information.

The interview was conducted by Ms. Françoise Hetto-Gaasch, member of the committee of Europa Donna Luxembourg.

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