

Case Study - Sligo University Hospital

Herb Garden Project



Background

Dietary restrictions play a vital role in the successful long-term management of chronic kidney disease. Reducing salt intake is particularly important for the management of high blood pressure. High blood pressure is common in kidney disease. Therefore dietitians recommend that patients on dialysis (a type of treatment for end stage kidney disease) stop using salt and avoid eating salty foods. This is, in addition to other individualised dietary restrictions (potassium, phosphate, and fluid) depending on the patient's condition. The resulting renal diet can be bland and lacking in flavour, as well as limited in foods. Fresh herbs are a wonderful way of boosting the natural flavour of food, especially when one is following a low-salt diet.



What was done

Herb Demonstrations

In April 2022 one of our catering team, Ms Geraldine McGuinn, volunteered to bring in samples of a variety of fresh herbs from her own garden to show to, and give to, our patients attending the hospital for dialysis. This generated interest, and the desire to smell, feel, and taste, the different herbs. Many took small packets of herbs home to use with their meals.

The idea

IDEAS ARE FUNNY LITTLE THINGS. THEY DON'T WORK UNLESS YOU DO. Quote by Unknown Author.

As a result of i) awareness of how restricted a renal diet can be, and ii) witnessing the patients' enthusiasm for, and appreciation of the herb demonstrations we formed the idea that: "Wouldn't it be great to grow our own fresh herbs. Patients could see these being planted, grown, and then take some for their own use. More patients might even grow their own herbs at home

Our managers and the Sligo Branch of The Irish Kidney Association encouraged developing our project proposal and committed their support.

The Work

A grassy patch of ground close to the dialysis unit was identified as a suitable location for our project. Staff and patient opinions were sought to ensure easy and safe access – raised beds were required and the herbs had to be within reach of wheelchair users. With funding from the HSE Climate

Action & Sustainability Office, Martin Casserly, Environment and Waste Management Co-ordinator, decided, and set to work with his team, on the construction of a new path and a gravel area on which to place the beds. He sourced two sustainable, low-maintenance beds in which to plant the herbs. These were filled with compost. On a wet Monday morning in March, Geraldine planted our first bed with chives, sage, rosemary thyme, oregano, lemon-thyme, and mint.



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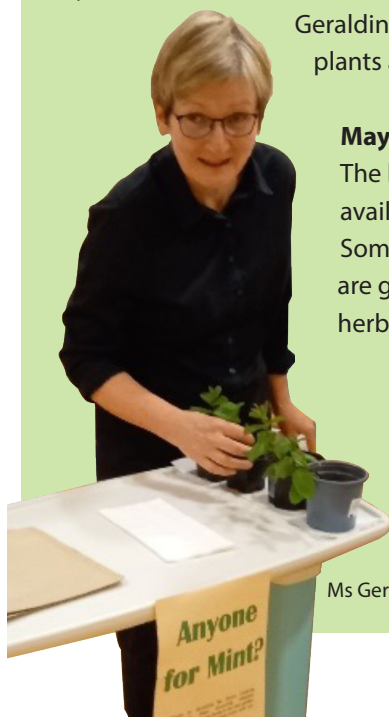
Education

Many patients were happy, even amused to receive herb samples, but it was obvious that they didn't know how to use them. A parallel education programme would be required to enlighten our population on how to cook with the herbs. Liz produced a leaflet with practical tips and recipes. A copy of the leaflet was given to each patient on dialysis. As an added bonus, for a dozen lucky patients,

Geraldine donated potted mint plants already growing.

May 2023

The herbs are growing and available for patients and staff. Some of our renal in-patients are given samples of the fresh herbs.



The Next Steps

- We are preparing a sign to be placed alongside the herb beds.
- The second bed will be planted – with parsley, coriander, marjoram, dill, and fennel.
- Another leaflet to be designed including patients' favourite recipes using fresh herbs.
- Engage other staff who have volunteered to help with our project.
- Organise an open day to celebrate our project.
- Geraldine is extending SUH Herb Project to the outside dining area for staff.
- Share the project story with colleagues throughout the country.

The project team (Geraldine, Martin and Liz) would like to acknowledge the encouragement and support that has been given to this project by patients, staff colleagues, the Sligo Branch of the Irish Kidney Association and the HSE Climate Action & Sustainability Office. We look forward to your ongoing support as the Sligo University Hospital Herb Project evolves and grows from strength to strength.