

Dietetics Workforce Demand Study Task Force Supplement: An Introduction

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You can and should shape your own future; because if you don't somebody else surely will—Joel Barker, Futurist and Expert in the Concept of Paradigm Shifts

UNDERSTANDING THE FUTURE of the dietetics profession and the role of dietetics practitioners during the next decade demands an in-depth understanding of the factors in the environment driving the profession. To effectively meet these challenges, dietetics practitioners will be required to use available data to understand future needs and to make changes. To achieve these goals, the Dietetics Workforce Demand Study Task Force (Figure 1), appointed by the Commission on Dietetic Registration, has completed a comprehensive review and future projections based on Task Force members' best understanding of the profession in 2011. In the more than 30 years since the first, and only, dietetics workforce demand study was conducted and published, the profession has grown steadily and consistently in each decade, with dietetic practitioners continuing to expand the roles within various sectors of dietetics practice and variety of practice settings (Figure 2).

In the 21st century, the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics will need to continue to rapidly identify future trends for the practice development, education, and credentialing needs of dietetics practitioners and the clients they serve. Understanding the workforce allows the Academy to better align its strategy and resources to adequately support the dietetics practitioner and develop new practitioners to achieve the profession's goals and position the profession to meet future demands. Many have visions of the future that include the recognition, rewards, and respect for the profession that dietetics practitioners so richly deserve. To reach this vision, the Academy is challenged by the need to confront three

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Figure 1. Commission on Dietetic Registration Dietetics Workforce Demand Study Task Force, 2011-2012.

major goals: increase entrants into the profession; learn to work effectively, proactively, and, when appropriate, in partnership with competitors; and support dietetics practitioners in the development and advancement of career skills and competencies that meet the demands of society and the workplace.

This Supplement reports the work of the Dietetics Workforce Demand Study Task Force during the period 2009-2011. A major component of the work has included an extensive examination of the factors influencing workforce supply and demand, and this Supplement presents articles that are based on these factors and that support the work of the Task Force.

FUTURE CHANGES DRIVING DIETETIC WORKFORCE SUPPLY AND DEMAND: FUTURE SCAN 2011 TO 2021

The Future Scan identifies the 10 change drivers anticipated to have the greatest impact on the dietetics profession's workforce supply and demand and presents the research supporting each driver. Drivers with the highest anticipated impact are aging of the population and profession, workforce education and entry to the profession, interdisciplinary teaming, and population risk factors and nutrition initiatives that will increase demand.

FOUR FUTURES FOR DIETETICS WORKFORCE SUPPLY AND DEMAND: 2011-2021 SCENARIOS

Using four scenarios that depict a range of different supply to demand ratios (namely, Underprepared for the Future, Preferred Future, Feared Future, and Overproduced Future) this article illustrates the critical changes and choices that lie ahead for the profession. The scenarios were used to explore how the future might unfold and to explore the critical choices that will be needed during the next decade.

POPULATION RISK FACTORS AND TRENDS IN HEALTH CARE AND PUBLIC POLICY

This article provides the technical, in-depth background for understanding population risk factors that will affect the dietetics profession in the coming decade, the current workforce, and the anticipated shifting intervention approaches and changing practice roles.

FRAMEWORK FOR ANALYZING SUPPLY AND DEMAND FOR SPECIALIST AND ADVANCED PRACTICE REGISTERED DIETITIANS

Based on a review of how registered dietitians (RDs) are currently practicing in spe-

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Practice sector	Examples of sector roles
Health promotion/disease prevention	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Assess needs and implement Nutrition Care Process ● Develop, deliver, and evaluate individual and population-based health-promotion/disease-prevention programs involving food, nutrition, health, and fitness ● Translate evidence-based research into practice
Public policy/advocacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Inform, influence, advocate, and assist in development, implementation, and evaluation of food and nutrition policy, regulations, and legislation that promote sound practices for the health of the public as well as improvement in food-manufacturing policies, nutrient quality, and safety of foods ● Translate evidence-based research into practice
Clinical health care	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Implement Nutrition Care Process for clients ● Serve as autonomous food and nutrition expert on health care team ● Translate evidence-based research into practice ● Organize, manage, and monitor effectiveness of medical nutrition therapy for patients with complex nutrition and health issues and present findings in scientific publications and at conferences ● Advocate advancement of food and nutrition services within the health care environment ● Develop systems and protocols to improve patient and client care and satisfaction
Management of food and nutrition service systems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Plan, organize, direct, control, and evaluate provision of food and/or nutrition services ● Work to meet customer expectations and achieve vision/objectives of department and organization ● Serve as contributing member of institution management or administrative team ● Translate evidence-based research into practice
Research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Design, implements, analyze, and interpret research related to health, nutrition, food, food production, nutrition care process, service systems, education, etc ● Disseminate research findings ● Translate evidence-based research for practitioners
Higher education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Develop curricula and programs to meet goals of students, accrediting bodies, and current and emerging professional roles ● Define and measure student outcomes ● Design, apply, and evaluate teaching methodologies ● Teach and apply evidence-based research

Figure 2. Roles of dietetics practitioners in various practice sectors. Source: American Dietetic Association. *Report to the House of Delegates: Final Report of the Phase 2 Future Practice and Education Task Force.* July 15, 2008 (unpublished).

cialist roles and the opportunities for advanced practice, this article provides current supply information and opportunities for dietetics practitioners to develop future practice roles.

AN OVERVIEW OF THE INTENTIONS OF HEALTH CARE REFORM

This article presents a summary of health care reform legislation and describes its impact on the dietetics profession so far, and its implications for the future.

DIETETICS TRENDS AS REFLECTED IN VARIOUS PRIMARY RESEARCH PROJECTS: 1995-2011

This analysis of 12 research projects (eg, dietetics practice audits, compensation and benefits surveys, and member-needs assessments) conducted in the past 16 years presents trends related to workforce supply and demand.

DIETETICS SUPPLY AND DEMAND: 2010-2020 QUANTITATIVE REPORT

Conducted by the Lewin Group, this report is a review of the supply and demand drivers with projections for the workforce supply and demand for the next decade. Mathematical modeling—one that can be used by the Academy moving forward—was used to develop the projections.

While considering the future and the changes that will affect the dietetics profession, it is clear that both RDs and dietetic technicians, registered, may need to make substantial changes in their practice in order to remain on the cutting edge. The world is moving at lightning speed, and the success of dietetics practitioners will depend on how fast we can reinvent ourselves to maintain our relevance. The goal is to position the profession to thrive in this rapidly changing environment—to create opportunities out of the challenges that dietetics practitioners will encounter. Dietetics practitioners need to be the

change agent that steers the profession in the direction of a desirable future. To create this desired future will require a shared responsibility between the Academy and the individual members.

Experts have defined the characteristics that individuals need to succeed in a continually changing setting, whether at home or work. Adaptability and risk taking will be essential. The profession will no longer be able to afford the luxury of expecting perfection—perfection paralysis will get the profession nowhere. Instead, dietetics practitioners will need to learn to move quickly then reassess to determine if additional changes are needed. Future success will also require the acceptance of ambiguity, uncertainty, and continued change. In addition, dietetics practitioners will need to be resilient and flexible, as the ability to “go with the flow” will be imperative for a winning tomorrow. Dietetics practitioners come from a science-based educational background, so some of the characteristics or qualities for successfully navigating change are

outside the comfort zone for many dietetics practitioners, but maintenance of technical expertise is essential throughout development of the skills and characteristics necessary for the new tomorrow.

Ten years from now, professional practice in dietetics might be very different from what it is today. Dietetics practitioners will need to become lifelong learners and continually be in the process of participating in focused training or retooling. Members of the profession have the technical nutrition expertise, but additional skills—including interpersonal skills, leadership, interdisciplinary team skills, and communication—will be needed for the workplace of tomorrow. Dietetics practitioners must be able to maximize oppor-

tunities by influencing change at all organizational levels, which will necessitate the development of business skills, including management and administration, to demonstrate value by measuring cost-effectiveness. Communicating the worth of dietetics practitioners using business language will be imperative to influence people in leadership positions, such as policy makers and administrators.

Employers will continue to move away from hiring based on credentials to hiring based on skills, and dietetics practitioners will need to demonstrate that they possess those skills. Dietetics practitioners will also need to broaden their perspective and begin looking at and understanding the larger health care or foodservice

environment that affects them. In other words, they will need to begin seeing the world from a much larger, more holistic viewpoint than just food and nutrition alone.

While reading this Supplement, readers are encouraged to consider how the next decade will affect the profession and what their role will be in the future of nutrition and dietetics. Each RD and dietetic technician, registered has the ability to shape the future by supporting entry of new professionals into the profession, strategically dealing with competition, and continuing development of the technical and business skills and competencies needed to succeed.

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