

HOD Fact Sheet

House of Delegates

Fall 2012

Credited to Katrina Holt, District of Columbia delegate and Academy Public Health Task Force member

“Knowing is not enough; we must apply. Willing is not enough; we must do.” Goethe

The Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act signed into law in 2010 promises to change the health-care-delivery systems in the United States, partly by shifting focus from disease treatment to disease prevention. Nutrition's vital role in preventing diseases and conditions could translate to additional opportunities for registered dietitians as a result of provisions in the law. Specific dietetics-related areas targeted by the law include medical nutrition therapy for chronic conditions and employee-wellness-incentive programs (1).

In November 2011, Sylvia Escott-Stump, Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics (Academy) president, appointed a task force to provide the Academy with direction related to public health nutrition. The purpose of the task force was to address a strategic priority in the Board of Director's Strategic Plan 2011–2012, which calls for enhancing the relevance of public health nutrition within the Academy and increasing the Academy's visibility in the public health community. The task force's charge included developing an action plan focusing on enhancing the Academy's role in public health nutrition (2). One of the items in the action plan was to submit a mega issue on public health nutrition for a future HOD meeting dialogue session.

Mega Issue Question

In an evolving health services environment, how can our members seize opportunities and provide leadership in public health nutrition and community nutrition?

Expected Outcome

Academy members will:

1. Recognize, prepare for, and seize opportunities in public health nutrition and community nutrition.
2. Be leaders in public health nutrition and community nutrition by actively working in policy development, assessment, assurance, advocacy, environmental change, education, and programs and services.
3. Provide input on how to prepare members to meet public health nutrition and community nutrition needs.

Defining Public Health Nutrition and Community Nutrition

One of the task force's first steps was to come to consensus on definitions of public health nutrition and community nutrition, terms that are often used interchangeably, although their meanings differ. In 2003, Roger Hughes wrote that “there have been various attempts in the international literature to define the field of public health nutrition distinct from the well established field of clinical nutrition and dietetics” (3). More recently, Roger Hughes and Barrie Margetts wrote, “a public health approach is traditionally defined by its focus on prevention rather than treatment, populations rather than individuals, and interventions that address the determinants of health rather than the treatment of disease” (4). The task force also identified main functions and examples of typical tasks performed by public health nutritionists and community nutritionists, which are listed below:

The main functions of public health nutritionists include:

- Taking a leadership role in identifying communities' nutrition-related needs
- Planning, directing, and evaluating health-promotion and disease-prevention efforts
- Administering and managing programs, including supervising personnel
- Developing and/or assisting in the preparation of a budget
- Identifying and seeking resources (e.g., grants, contracts) to support programs and services
- Providing therapeutic and rehabilitation nutrition services, when these needs are not adequately met by other parts of the health care system
- Providing technical assistance/consultation to policymakers, administrators, and other health agency personnel

- Collaborating with others to promote environmental and systems changes
- Ensuring access to healthy and affordable food and nutrition-related care
- Advocating for and participating in policy development and evaluation of impacts and outcomes
- Participating in research, demonstration, and evaluation projects

Examples

- Collaborating with city planners to change environments to increase access, availability, and affordability of healthy food options, such as providing tax incentives to full-service grocery stores to locate in rural areas
- Developing and utilizing surveillance systems to monitor the nutritional state of a population group
- Developing policies to impact healthy eating and physical activity, such as working with transportation departments to promote access to safe, affordable, and healthy food venues
- Developing and implementing policies and procedures to promote and support breastfeeding in the workplace

The main functions of community nutritionists include:

- Conducting and evaluating nutrition education and counseling for small groups and individuals
- Planning, implementing, and evaluating primary and secondary prevention interventions
- Providing therapeutic and rehabilitation nutrition services
- Administering programs
- Participating in care coordination or providing case management

Examples

- Conducting food demonstrations/classes for individuals enrolled in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)
- Training peer counselors or promotoras to promote breastfeeding
- Conducting in-service education for school foodservice personnel
- Developing nutrition-education activities for the school classroom
- Providing technical assistance/consultation to health providers on case management for nutrition- and dietetics-related issues
- Participating in interdisciplinary teams conducting home visits

Summary

As health care continues to change, it is important that Academy members recognize the long history of public health nutrition and community nutrition and look ahead toward ensuring that these fields play a vital role in the future of the dietetics profession.

Over the next few years, the Academy's Public Health Action Plan will be implemented to help members build their knowledge about and interest in this area of practice. The Academy will work to integrate public health and community nutrition philosophies, serving communities, including vulnerable and underserved populations, and activities throughout all the Academy's organizational units.

What HOD Needs from You

Talk with your delegate(s) about this issue in advance of the Fall 2012 HOD Meeting (October 5–6, 2012). Delegate contact information is available at www.eatright.org/leaderdirectory. The backgrounder is available at www.eatright.org/hod > Fall HOD Meeting Materials.

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References

1. Tuma PA. An overview of the intentions of health care reform. *Journal of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics*. 2012;112(3 Suppl):S56–S63.
2. Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, Public Health Task Force. *Public Health Nutrition: Action Plan*. 2012.
3. Hughes R. Definitions for public health nutrition: A developing consensus. *Public Health Nutrition*. 2003;6(6):615–620.
4. Hughes R, Margetts BM. *Practical Public Health Nutrition*. West Sussex, United Kingdom: Wiley-Blackwell; 2011.