

HOD Executive Summary

House of Delegates

Fall 2012

The Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act that passed in 2010 and June's Supreme Court ruling that upheld most of the law promises to change health care delivery systems in the United States, partly by shifting focus from disease treatment to disease prevention. Registered dietitians (RDs) have already taken an active role in health care areas that stand to be directly affected by provisions in the health care reform bill. However, nutrition's vital role in preventing diseases and conditions potentially could translate to additional opportunities for RDs as a result of this reform(1,2).

Sylvia Escott-Stump appointed a Public Health Task Force in November 2011 to provide direction for the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics (Academy) related to public health nutrition. The purpose of the task force was to address a strategic priority in the 2011-2012 Board of Director's Strategic Plan, which calls for enhancing the relevance of public health nutrition within the Academy and increasing the Academy's visibility in the broader public health community. Among the charges placed on the task force was to develop an action plan focusing on enhancing the Academy's role in public health nutrition. An action item noted in the plan was to submit a mega issue related to public health nutrition for a future HOD Meeting dialogue session (3).

Mega Issue Question:

In a changing 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.
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 the needs in public health nutrition and community nutrition.

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 promotores 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 nutrition and community nutrition philosophies, serving communities, including vulnerable and underserved populations, and activities throughout all the Academy's organizational units.

To obtain the full backgrounder www.eatright.org/hod > Spring HOD Meeting Materials.