



# The Uses of Technology and Data

**E**MERGING TECHNOLOGIES ARE swiftly transforming all aspects of our lives, including health care. Registered dietitian nutritionists (RDNs) and nutrition and dietetics technicians, registered (NDTRs) must be willing and able to adapt and embrace new challenges—resulting in more successful outcomes for our patients and clients.

The Academy is moving rapidly to assist members in applying technological innovation to all areas of practice. Our website [eatrightPRO.org](http://eatrightPRO.org) is filled with information and resources. A new dietetic practice group, Nutrition Informatics, is available for members to join. Of 19 session tracks at the Food & Nutrition Conference & Expo, one is titled “Technology Impacting Practice.” As of this writing, the track will contain nine sessions. Nutrition informatics self-study modules can be purchased through [eatrightSTORE.org](http://eatrightSTORE.org).

## TIME TO GAIN SKILLS IS NOW

Many Academy members are already using cutting-edge technology in their practices and are advocates for its use throughout the profession. Ben Atkinson, MS, RDN, CD, is the coordinator for child nutrition services at the Auburn (Washington) School District, past chair of the Academy's Interoperability and Standards Committee, secretary of the Nutrition Informatics dietetic practice group (DPG), and the Washington State Academy's representative in the House Delegates.

“The school nutrition field utilizes many types of technology,” Atkinson says, “such as touchscreens and barcode scanners at the point of sale, queries of databases to determine free and reduced meal status, management of student allergies in the student record system, utilization of new technology to prepare and cook food, and the use of dedicated systems to forecast usage, produce recipes and procure food.”

Atkinson agrees with Tamara Melton, MS, RDN, LD, of Atlanta, GA, director of

health informatics for Morrison Healthcare. “Now is the time for RDNs and NDTRs to be gaining skills so nutrition and dietetics can be included in health care technologies,” Melton says. “If not, we will have difficulty capturing data we need to support reimbursement for nutrition services and to implement quality improvement projects. This will also affect the care that we are able to provide our patients and clients.”

## TECH CONNECTS US ALL

In the area of public health nutrition, funding for programs is tighter than ever, according to Kathleen Pellechia, MS, RDN, of Catonsville, MD, communications manager at FHI 360, a nonprofit human development organization, and chair of the Nutrition Informatics DPG. “Building the evidence for nutrition education and behavior change through the collection, analysis, and—most importantly—compelling visualization of data is essential. And regardless of income level or ethnic background, technology connects us all. Using text messaging, apps, websites, and social media to reach the public with evidence-based information is important. We don't yet have the data for the efficacy of these tools for behavior change, and we won't have it until we spend more on research that targets community health and nutrition.”

Sonja Stetzler, MA, CPC, of Charlotte, NC, president and founder of Effective Connecting, who works with health professionals to improve their communications skills, says 3-D printing, robotics, and artificial intelligence and more will have an impact on our practices. “For example, 3-D printing is currently in use in Europe and in one hospital system in the US to prepare puréed foods for residents in long-term care and patients in hospitals. One manufacturer has predicted that 3-D food printing machines will be as ubiquitous as microwaves in our homes in about a decade.”



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## NEW TYPES OF LEARNING AND UNDERSTANDING

However, Stetzler adds: “Despite the advances in technology, it is imperative that we do not neglect to cultivate our ability to connect with others.” And in the words of futurist Clement Bezold, “Nanotechnologies represent another development that will alter approaches to health and disease prevention in the next two to three decades. Nanotechnology is the physical capability of controlling the structure of matter atom-by-atom and molecule-by-molecule. At this level of technology, virtually anything can be created that is not forbidden by physical laws.”<sup>1</sup>

When I think about the technology we have available today—let alone what the future holds—I realize, too, that increasing our knowledge requires new learning and new types of understanding. Application of technologies to elevate practice will also require new skills in personalized medicine. With these new learnings and skills we will move confidently into new roles and build on our value and the importance of our work.

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## Reference

1. Bezold C. Proceedings of Future Search Conference: *Challenging the Future of Dietetic Education and Credentialing—Dialogue, Discovery, and Directions*. Chicago, IL: The American Dietetic Association and Commission on Dietetic Registration; 1994:7.