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VUCA Environment Creates Opportunities for Dietetics Innovations

What an unimaginable year we have had! Together, we have experienced life through the lens of quarantine; enduring a global pandemic, racial and social injustices in society, climate change disasters, and major shifts in the way we live, work, communicate, and educate ourselves and our students.

In the past year, you have taken your dedication to nutrition and dietetics practice to new levels, including many of you serving on the front lines of the COVID-19 pandemic. I have been so honored to serve alongside you as we address vital issues facing not only the Academy but our entire nation and world.

Although an introspective focus alone will not completely prepare us for future trends, this month I am highlighting more perspectives from our own Academy members on how an environment of volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity—or VUCA—and technological trends could impact our profession and create opportunities for greater diversity and innovations in career laddering, education, global food systems, data-driven outcomes, nutrition informatics, quality process improvements, and consumer outreach.

The Academy's Council on Future Practice and House of Delegates uses VUCA to describe an environment of constant, unpredictable change. A few examples of a VUCA environment: information overload; information that is incomplete or contradictory; polarization; consumer mistrust and doubt; digital infrastructure vulnerabilities; accelerated technological obsolescence; and organizations working harder and faster to achieve greater flexibility and just-in-time responsiveness.

AMPLIFY!

Throughout my President's Perspective articles, I have encouraged you to see yourself as a business brand with the power to persuade and influence. I challenged you to commit to scientific rigor, prioritize our legislative and advocacy efforts, and pay it forward through mentoring. I feel these efforts will greatly impact your potential to "Amplify Your Voice, Your Career, Your Impact," to quote the theme of the Academy's 2020 dues renewal campaign.

In April, I discussed how the pace of change and innovation is accelerating, and I encouraged you to raise your eyes to the broader view of global change. I shared what I had learned about large-scale future trends that could expand our opportunities for influence and leadership into fields beyond nutrition and dietetics.

Throughout this VUCA year, I am proud that we as an Academy have demonstrated resilience, courage to act, and perseverance. We have looked internally as individual members and as an organization. We have stepped up to support each other. We have listened, asked questions, faced challenges head-on, and inspired change.

CAREER LADDERING

Although change is never-ending and ever-evolving, it does create significant opportunities for you to have greater impact and value. The future of dietetics practice is in your hands, and I believe that career laddering strengthens the profession and facilitates the opportunity to build a culturally prepared and more diverse nutrition and dietetics workforce. A career ladder enriches our profession as we seek to address the needs of society and offers students and practitioners options to fulfil their career aspirations. In "The Benefits of Career Ladders,"¹ Michael Roberts describes a career ladder as a process allowing individuals to build knowledge, skills, and credentials to advance career growth, salary, or responsibility.¹ As practice areas, settings, and roles continue to evolve, I hope we create career ladder pathways to enter our profession at various levels of education and training.

"While a master's degree will soon be the entry-level degree required to practice as a registered dietitian nutritionist, there is an urgent need for more doctoral-trained RDNs with a solid understanding of research methods and design, a strong understanding of statistics, and the ability to carefully and critically analyze and interpret research data and results," says Gail P. A. Kauwell, PhD, RDN, LDN, FAND, professor and chair of the Department of Health Sciences at the University of Central Florida.

"There are a plethora of unanswered questions and outdated nutrition practices that need to be addressed in all areas of nutrition and dietetics practice. Having the skills to prepare successful nutrition-focused grant applications and conduct well-designed studies will provide the evidence needed to expand what we know and support or refute claims and practice applications for the ultimate benefit of consumers around the globe. These skills are endemic to all research doctorate programs, leaving a wide berth for

choosing a degree program in any number of disciplines that align with nutrition and dietetics,” Kauwell says.

“A profession with more research doctorate RDNs also will provide more experts to evaluate and comment on hot-off-the-press research studies and claims. We also need to expand the number of doctoral-trained RDNs (PhD, DCN, and EdD) to educate and train future RDNs, especially as we approach the new degree requirements for entry into practice,” Kauwell says. “Engagement in the research process, creating new knowledge, testing and evaluating existing nutrition practices, and enhancing our educational programs to embrace research are keys to perpetuating and propelling our profession to even greater recognition as the nutrition experts.”

REIMAGINING GLOBAL FOOD SYSTEMS

“Climate change and its associated impacts will dramatically alter the future of global food systems, says Chris Vogliano, PhD, RDN, technical advisor of food systems at USAID Advancing Nutrition. “A new term has been coined: ‘the global syndemic,’ which means the triple threat of undernutrition, overnutrition, and climate change.

“Climate change is already challenging food production in the form of droughts and floods and is predicted to significantly reduce the micronutrient availability of key staple crops like corn and rice, on which much of the global population relies as their primary source of nutrition. Registered dietitian nutritionists are uniquely positioned to act as the liaison between science and food system change across the fields of food service, health care, research, policy, and consumer behavior change,” he says.

“It is increasingly important to leverage the expertise of RDNs and work across disciplines to reimagine food systems that are healthy, equitable, biodiverse, culturally appropriate, and sustainable for both present and future generations,” Vogliano says.

VALUE-BASED CARE AND DATA-DRIVEN OUTCOMES

“The health care landscape is shifting away from transactional fee-for-service reimbursement and toward payments and strategies that reward quality care and improved patient outcomes,” says Whitney Franz, MPH, a member of the House of Delegates Big Data Task Force.

The Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics Health Informatics Infrastructure enables RDNs to track nutrition care outcomes and advance evidence-based nutrition practice research. Visit ANDHII at www.eatrightPRO.org/research/projects-tools-and-initiatives/andhii.

“To succeed, health care delivery systems are adapting to more proactive, data-driven approaches to population health management. Data are essential to understand and intervene with high-risk patient populations, close gaps in care, track and improve patient outcomes, and ultimately optimize payment. RDNs must position themselves as key partners in team-based care and population health management

strategies—showing that RDNs add measurable value to improving health outcomes and highlighting the role of nutrition in chronic disease management, disease prevention, health equity, and community health,” Franz says.

NUTRITION INFORMATICS IMPACT

In the words of the Public Health Informatics Institute, “Information is what you need. Informatics is how you get it.”²

“All RDNs and NDTRs use nutrition informatics. Some make it their primary practice area,” says Kathleen Pellechia, MS, RDN, chair of the Nutrition Informatics dietetic practice group. “We define nutrition informatics as the intersection of information, nutrition, and technology, but it is more than an intersection; it is a balancing act.

“If we build technology with poor data, then we will not be effective; if we have good data, but a weak technology infrastructure, we will not be effective. We can’t have one without the other. The Nutrition Informatics DPG, in partnership with the Academy, is poised to help nutrition professionals advocate for advancing access to nutrition data and technology platforms and to further their skills in this exploding career market. The end goal is to not only advance our profession but to positively impact the health care system through access to evidence-based nutrition services that utilize and offer quality improvement, better outcomes, and cost savings and transparency,” Pellechia says.

Learn about informatics at the Academy: www.eatrightPRO.org/practice/practice-resources/nutrition-informatics

“As the expert nutrition professionals, we are poised to imprint ourselves in the field of informatics and to increase our impact factor. But to do that we have to strengthen our skills, amplify our presence, and build data sets that support our work and more. And it all starts with understanding where we fit into the larger landscape of health informatics,” Pellechia says.

LEVERAGE TECHNOLOGY, BIG DATA AND CONNECTIVITY

Leveraging technology and big data to accelerate growth and innovation transcends every Academy strategic focus area: prevention and well-being, nutrition care and health systems, nutrition security, food safety, and diversity and inclusion.

Big Data works on the principle that the more you know about any given topic, the more reliably you can gain new insights and make predictions about the future. By comparing more data points, relationships will begin to emerge that were previously hidden, and these relationships will enable us to learn and inform our decisions.

Many future opportunities lie in personalized nutrition, new food system technologies, consumer insight data, integration of technology education into nutrition and dietetics curriculum and in the burgeoning field of nutrigenomics.

USE AND DEVELOP NEW TECHNOLOGIES

“New technologies are facilitating greater real-time connectivity; more expansive collection of data about ourselves and our physical world; and more robust predictive modeling to help generate novel insights from a growing pool of data,” say Council on Future Practice members Kellene A. Isom, PhD, MS, RD, CAGS; Shannon Robson, PhD, MPH, RD; and Marie Spiker, PhD, MSPH, RDN.

“Many new technologies have the goal of promoting human nutrition and health by adding to the research base, improving the clinical experience, or changing the way patients and clients access information about themselves or about nutrition. Advanced tools such as continuous glucose monitors that predict glucose levels and provide patients with personalized nutrition recommendations are just one of many examples. Our preferred future should include credentialed nutrition and dietetics practitioners as not only keeping up with how people are using new technologies, but also having a seat at the table as new nutrition-related technologies are developed. Translating evidence-based nutrition care into technologies that will complement and amplify our efforts to improve human nutrition and health is essential.”

ADVANCING THE NUTRITION CARE PROCESS AND QUALITY

“The RDNs role in Quality has never been more relevant than it is today,” says Kelly Danis, RD, LDN, FAND, past member of the Quality Leader Alliance and chair of the Clinical Nutrition Managers DPG. “Identification and participation in improvement opportunities involving the Nutrition Care Process are best served when we, as the nutrition experts, are involved. Through these efforts we are able to demonstrate the important role RDNs play in improving processes and patient and client outcomes across the health care continuum.”

Learn about quality strategies at the Academy: www.eatrightPRO.org/practice/quality-management/quality-improvement/quality-strategies

“This work also leads to future opportunities to build on prior initiatives and address new opportunities as the health care industry evolves. Embrace the opportunities that surround you. Continue to demonstrate the positive impact nutrition plays in avoiding the negative outcomes of malnutrition. Show the value that nutrition professionals bring to this arena and contribute to advancing and elevating the importance of our role in the quality process,” Danis says.

CONSUMER IMPACT AND INNOVATION

“Consumers have had a dramatic change in how they spend their time and more importantly how they feed themselves and their families. Academy members need to be asking, ‘What can we do differently to help consumers in the midst of change?’” says Joe Derochowski, vice president and home improvement industry advisor at the NPD Group and former public member of the Academy’s Board of Directors.

“Odds are consumers will continue to work from home more, whether full or part time. This means consumers will be eating more meals and snacks at home, which means they will be looking for inspiration and guidance, opening the door for Academy members to help establish behaviors that can last a lifetime,” Derochowski says.

“We need to be innovative in the ways we are engaging consumers. Can we expand the scope of our influence to not only the consumers in front of us but to people of all ages in their in their extended family?”

“We have to be thinking long term about the role we play in a broader competitive context and asking ourselves whether there is a different role we want to play? For example, major appliance companies are on the precipice of helping consumers answer the question, ‘What’s for dinner?’ by leveraging the items on hand in their refrigerators and pantries and providing suggestions for consumers. These suggestions can be tailored to each individual in the family, including those who have specific dietary needs,” Derochowski says.

CONSTANT SUPPORT FROM ACADEMY COLLEAGUES

As I look back on all the twists and turns I’ve experienced in my career, I am struck by two thoughts. First, the road I traveled was not the one I had envisioned as a dietetic intern nor what I had planned in my mind’s eye. Change and VUCA experiences played an influential role in my choices and decisions. Eventually, I learned to enjoy the challenge of change and, in many ways, I felt I was moving backward if I was not changing.

Second, my colleagues in the Academy have been my constant support during good and challenging times, guiding me with wise counsel, effective practice examples, friendship, and encouragement to stand up for what is right and true and to go bigger. I believe Academy membership is essential to a successful and fulfilling career for every food and nutrition professional, and I encourage you all to become actively engaged lifelong members.

It has been the highest honor of my life to have served as your 2020–2021 president. I am so proud to have served alongside all Academy volunteers, members, and staff at every level of the organization. Your important contributions this year helped navigate us through unprecedented times. Thank you to our Academy Board of Directors. You were thoughtful, intentional, and diligent in carrying out our mission, always keeping our members top of mind. Thank you to Past-President Terri Raymond, MA, RD, CD, FAND. You mentored me with grace, clear-headed thinking, and unwavering support. To President-elect Kevin Sauer, PhD, RDN, LD, FAND, I know the Academy will flourish under your leadership. And to our CEO, Patricia Babjak, MLIS, your 24/7 commitment and ability to lead our organization and manage its resources during these turbulent times deserves high praise. You were my constant support and closest partner, empowering me to lead our path forward with confidence. My sincerest heartfelt thank you to you all!

As I said in my Opening Session remarks at the 2020 Food & Nutrition Conference & Expo virtual event, “We have a rich history. Our profession goes well beyond a building or

one meeting place or an era or a set of questions or problems that we may encounter. The actions we take today will directly shape, influence, and generate the possibilities of tomorrow....I urge you to get involved. Think and act boldly; identify and tackle challenges. Be change makers and take actions that will shine a light on our amazing profession.”

Our strength is in each other and our science- and evidence-based profession. Each of us has an important role

to play in how the Academy's future evolves. Together we can achieve anything!

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