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Recruiting and Preparing the Next Generation of Practitioners

The national and global medical and educational landscapes have changed greatly in recent years, and will continue to change. The Academy, our Foundation and the Accreditation Council for Education in Nutrition and Dietetics all recognize the need to recruit and train the next generation — and beyond — of RDNs, NDTRs and the educators who will prepare them.

Starting in 2024, the education requirements to become credentialed as a registered dietitian nutritionist in the United States will include a master's degree. This decision was made by the Commission on Dietetic Registration, based on the recommendations of the Council on Future Practice's 2012 Visioning Report:

The expansion of knowledge and need for both deeper and wider expertise has affected all health care professions in the last decade. Increasing entry-level degree requirements might enable future RDNs to be competitive and respected members of the health care team. In addition, the enhanced preparation for practice leads to better critical thinking and higher quality of care and protection of the public. Virtually all other allied health professions have increased entry-level educational standards beyond the bachelor's degree to either a master's degree or practice doctorate.¹

And as the Academy's Coding and Coverage Committee wrote in 2013:

Education needs to move to a higher degree for entry-level clinical practice. Credentials make a difference for our voice to be heard among organizations such as Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, American Medical Association, and others with a predominant "doctor" culture. ... Demands for knowledge and skills in today's health care environment far exceed those required in the past, and we must expand the current entry-level education preparation model. RDNs need to enter practice with evidence-based skills and with research competency to be able to demonstrate and document outcomes and effectiveness.²

The Academy is committed to helping practitioners make this important transition. "ACEND is working hard to be visionary and nimble as we prepare for the future," says Rayane AbuSabha, PhD, RD, ACEND's executive director.

Let me share with you just a few of ACEND's recent and current initiatives:

- Developing advanced- practice doctoral standards. ACEND's Expanded Standards Committee is developing

these standards to encourage elevating the preparation of nutrition and dietetics professionals, especially those who will prepare the next generation of RDNs.

- ACEND is exploring the Associate degree as a college bridging program. The Board has held discussions on pathways to improve enrollment and increase pathways into the profession.
- Expanding globally to increase international programs, including possible interest from applicants from many countries in the Caribbean, South America, Africa and the Middle East. Through the generosity of the Foundation, ACEND expects the first program in Africa, at the University of Ghana, to submit an application in 2023.
- The Board is taking steps this year to protect students enrolled in nutrition and dietetics programs, especially those in practice programs where they have to identify their own preceptors and facilities. We added in the standards the expectation for programs to assist the students or interns to find their sites, when needed.
- ACEND has been active in the area of Inclusion, Diversity, Equity and Access (IDEA), using data analytics to determine areas of need and offered webinars to increase awareness of DI programs and support them as they examined their admission practices to ensure they are non-discriminatory and inclusive; as a result, the diversity of interns has increased by over 8% since 2019.

ACEND's Board recently approved funds to recruit a Fellow through the Academy's Foundation who will develop a series of clinical workshops to train educators on a number of skills that were incorporated into ACEND's new 2022 Accreditation Standards. The ACEND fellow, Jody Vogelzang, PhD, RDN, CHES, FADA, FAND, will work closely with the Foundation and ACEND to lead a program of work that includes:



Jody Vogelzang, PhD, RDN,
CHES, FADA, FAND

- Supporting creation of the standards for an advanced practice doctorate in nutrition program.
- Coordinating all aspects of the clinical skills workshops.
- Providing additional resources and materials based on ACEND's Future Education Model accreditation standards data.

The Academy is committed as well to increasing the diversity of doctorally prepared educators in addition to practitioners. Last year, the Foundation awarded its first Diversity and Inclusion Fellowship to Marie Allsopp, MS, MPH, RD, LD. She is working to identify and find solutions to barriers that face students, RDNs and NDTRs of diverse backgrounds and cultures. And she leads the Foundation's program on Prioritizing Diversity and Inclusion in Nutrition and Dietetics: Overcoming Obstacles to RDN Recruitment, Education and Advancement.



Marie Allsopp, MS, MPH, RD, LD

These initiatives and many others are helping ACEND meet its goals, which include progress to “elevate the quality of nutrition and dietetics education across the globe” and “promote opportunities for diversity and access in dietetics education.” I encourage you to follow ACEND's successes and initiatives at <https://www.eatrightpro.org/acend>.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jand.2022.10.002>

References

1. Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics. Visioning Report Moving Forward – A Vision for the Continuum of Dietetics Education, Credentialing and Practice. Accessed September 20, 2022. <https://www.eatrightpro.org/-/media/eatrightpro-files/practice/future-practice/visioning-report-final.pdf>
2. Kicklighter JR, Cluskey MM, Hunter AM, et al. Council on Future Practice Visioning Report and Consensus Agreement for Moving Forward the Continuum of Dietetics Education, Credentialing, and Practice. *J Acad Nutr Diet*. 2013;113(12):1710-1732.