

NUTRITION AND DIETETICS ASSOCIATE (NDA)

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS ABOUT THE NUTRITION AND DIETETICS ASSOCIATE

Why was the NDA established?

Background

Both the 2011 national Future Connections Summit on Dietetics Practice, Credentialing and Education and the subsequent 2012 Visioning Report elicited input and support for a baccalaureate degree credential for DPD graduates. The Visioning Report was the topic of the Fall 2012 House of Delegates meeting dialogue. Over 600 members provided feedback prior to the meeting. The recommendations included in the Visioning Report were the focus of a January 2013 joint organization unit leaders meeting representing NDEP, CFP, ACEND and CDR.

The Academy Board of Directors passed a motion in January 2012 -- *to move forward with the development of a new credential for baccalaureate DPD Program graduates*. The intent of this action was:

- To recognize the Academy's obligation to baccalaureate DPD Program graduates
- To address regulatory issues
- To address the profession's workforce capacity issues
- To increase access to credible food and nutrition information and services
- To position graduates in gaining a competitive employment advantage

Obligation to DPD Program Graduates

Despite efforts on the part of the Academy and ACEND, the number of internship positions continue to lag significantly behind demand, leaving growing numbers of qualified students who are unable to complete their education to become an RDN. Annually approximately 2,000 baccalaureate degree graduates who meet DPD requirements and who receive a verification statement cannot obtain supervised practice required for registration eligibility. Although a new ACEND-accredited Individualized Supervised Practice Pathway (ISPP) was implemented in January of 2012 for those who do not receive an internship, a shortage of preceptors and supervised practice positions to support the ISPP option remains a barrier to full implementation.

In 2009, CDR established a new pathway allowing DPD Program graduates to take the Registration Examination for Dietetic Technicians. To date, 2,006 baccalaureate DPD Program graduates have taken the DTR exam and 1,309 hold the DTR credential. However, the practical reality is that these graduates' goal is to become RDNs, not DTRs.

Regulatory Issues

The Dietetics Workforce Demand Study emphasizes that in the future, students “will want more assurance that nutrition and dietetics education leads to immediate and sustained employment.” It is important to recognize that the government is in the process of developing regulations to address loan default rates, beginning at this time with for-profit institutions. How does that relate to this issue? Essentially, if a high percent of students are not gainfully employed or repaying their loans, their educational institutions may not qualify or may lose federal funding and potentially USDE recognition.

Workforce Capacity and Access Issues

The Board of Directors’ decision to establish the NDA also responds to the need to increase capacity and consumer access to credible food and nutrition information and services.

The ratio of RDNs to the US population is less than 1:8000. With a work force estimated at 56,472 full-time practitioners, maintaining viability in the marketplace is a challenge. Seventy-seven percent (77%) of the 73,340 RDNs (56,472) that are currently working in dietetics are employed full-time, leaving nearly one in four (23%) or 16,868 employed part-time (Compensation and Benefits Survey 2013, J Acad Nutr Diet, January 2014, 17-33). Other healthcare professionals and paraprofessionals readily step in to take the RDNs place in delivery of food and nutrition services. The NDA is positioned to expand consumer access to credible, evidence-based food and nutrition information and services at the appropriate scope and level, and differentiating between the DTR and RDN.

The marketplace continues to move forward in the proliferation of nutrition and dietetics related credentials at the baccalaureate level examples include: Exercise is Medicine credential from the American College of Sports Medicine; Certified Food Scientist from the Institute of Food Technology; the Certified in Public Health from the Council on Education for Public Health; Society for Nutrition Education and Behavior is developing a professional level certification for a Nutrition Education Specialist. Other credentials include Board Certification in Holistic Nutrition, Certified Clinical Nutritionist, and Certified Nutrition Specialist.

Some of these certificants position themselves as experts in health promotion, wellness and nutrition education. DPD Program graduates work in non-regulated dietetics-related positions, and without the professional recognition, many are already aligning with other related certification programs rather than with our nutrition and dietetics community or with their chosen profession. The NDA would not only connect them with the nutrition and dietetics profession and the Academy, it would elevate them in the marketplace and most importantly, help to protect the public. NDA practitioners could also provide support for future graduate degree-prepared RDNs to expand and elevate their practice.

Competitive Employment Advantage

A certification for baccalaureate degree graduates who have met DPD requirements signals a step in the right direction toward implementation of a recommendation from the Workforce Demand Study -- to “cultivate multiple levels of practice to meet marketplace demands and build capacity for delivery of nutrition services.” We know anecdotally that DPD Program graduates are working in community and school nutrition settings, e.g., WIC, wellness centers, health departments, supermarkets, etc.

To provide the Board with added information for its deliberations, almost 19,000 student members and student non-members were surveyed to gauge their interest. It is important to note that individuals who complete a baccalaureate degree and the academic requirements of an ACEND accredited DPD program are eligible to be members of the Academy’s Active category, therefore no new membership category is needed to accommodate these individuals. Despite this fact, survey results show that students seek more than membership; they desire a professional certification and are willing to take a curriculum-based examination to secure a competitive employment advantage. The NDA provides us with an opportunity to meet this need.

Notably, 81% of respondents believe they would gain a competitive market advantage by completion of a curriculum-based assessment.

How did the Academy choose the name Nutrition and Dietetics Associate (NDA)?

The Academy performed a market analysis of competing credentials currently being offered at the baccalaureate level and surveyed almost 19,000 nutrition and dietetics students on the perceived value and impression that various names would offer. The Academy Board of Directors evaluated the data and voted to approve the NDA based on the feedback received from students.

Is the NDA considered a CDR credential?

No. The Academy will certify that individuals meet knowledge and assessment requirements. The NDA will provide a database of DPD Program graduates for future CDR practice audits that may potentially serve as the basis for a practice credential in the future. The GED is an example of a curriculum-based assessment which is readily recognized by employers. We are aware that many DPD Programs already use curriculum-based assessments.

Why did CDR decide not to develop a practice credential?

CDR’s practice audit results compared DPD Program graduates practicing in nutrition and dietetics-related positions and practicing DTRs and found there was no differentiation in practice. While we know anecdotally that DPD Program graduates are working in community and school nutrition settings, we need to develop an expanded database of these practicing DPD Program graduates in order to have a cohort to conduct a practice audit specific to this group. That is the reason for not moving with a practice credential at this time, instead certifying that individuals meet rigorous knowledge and assessment requirements.

Why don't DPD Program graduates just take the Registration Examination for Dietetic Technicians?

The intent of the NDA is to recognize the distinct roles and education of baccalaureate DPD Program graduates from the DTR.

Will the NDA replace the dietetic technician, registered (DTR)?

No, the NDA is not meant to replace the DTR. The DTR is a practice-based credential. The DTR exam remains an option for baccalaureate DPD Program graduates who wish to practice as DTRs.

Will the NDA replace the Registered Dietitian Nutritionist (RDN)?

No, the NDA is not meant to replace the RDN. NDAs can provide support to RDNs in expanding and elevating their practice. The NDA also supports the trend of the health care labor force by identifying the difference between basically prepared and professional-level RDN practitioners. This model increases demand for practitioners at both ends of the education spectrum and reinforces the need to define, recognize and support multiple levels of practice in a variety of practice areas. The Affordable Care Act places a renewed emphasis on prevention and wellness services. Nutrition is an integral component of these services, and the NDA will assist in closing capacity gaps in non-regulated areas, such as community and school nutrition settings, WIC, supermarkets and wellness centers.

How will the practice roles of NDAs be monitored?

Employers determine the practice roles for employees based on their employment setting, job expectations and applicable governmental and non-governmental regulations. An example is practicing MNT. Although DPD programs address MNT in curriculums, employers determine who is allowed to practice MNT based on applicable employer policies and regulations. The Academy will continue to publish practice standards differentiating practice roles at all levels of nutrition and dietetics practice.

How do DPD Program graduates become an NDA?

The NDA requires a two-step process:

Step 1: Program Directors will provide a Verification Statement, verifying completion of a DPD Program and a transcript, verifying completion of a baccalaureate degree.

Step 2: Applicants will successfully complete an online, curriculum-based examination.

When will the application for the NDA be available?

The application will be available on the Academy's website in late Summer 2014.

Will there be an examination?

Yes. We anticipate the first computer-based examination to be administered in the 2014-2015 year. The content will be based on essential DPD Program knowledge requirements.

How much will the examination cost?

Costs will be determined after the testing vendor is selected. The fee will be published in Summer 2014.

Is earning a NDA required?

No. The NDA is optional. However, the NDA provides baccalaureate DPD Program graduates a competitive advantage by demonstrating their knowledge to provide credible food and nutrition information and services.

The NDA allows recipients to stay connected to the nutrition and dietetics profession, elevates them in the marketplace and most importantly, helps protect the public.

Will those who earn the NDA have to be re-certified every few years?

No. If in the future it transitions to a practice-based credential, re-certification would be required.

Will ACEND use the NDA assessment results for program accreditation?

No. ACEND will not receive examination results or use them for program accreditation. It will be up to ACEND to decide if at some future date it wishes to consider using the results once reliability and validity are established.

Is there a timeline for implementation of the NDA that program directors may share with students?

Yes. We anticipate that the first examination will be administered in the 2014-2015 year. Additional information will be provided on the Academy's website as it becomes available.

Do I have to be an Academy member to earn the NDA?

No. Separate member and non-member applications and fees will be established for those who wish to pursue the NDA.

Is the NDA an Academy membership category?

No. Individuals who complete a baccalaureate degree and the academic requirements of an ACEND-accredited DPD Program are already eligible to be members of the Academy's Active member category; therefore, no new membership category is needed to accommodate these individuals.

Will members who qualify for the NDA also qualify for the Career Starter graduated dues program?

Yes, recent graduates who qualify for the NDA will have earned a minimum of a baccalaureate degree and completed a DPD Program accredited by ACEND, and thus would already qualify for the Academy's Active membership category. As Active category members in their first five years, those who opt for the NDA will qualify for the Career Starter dues program, just like they do now.

To whom should inquiries on the new NDA Program be directed?

Inquiries can be directed to Diane Moore Enos, MPH, RDN, FAND, Vice President, Professional Development and Assessment, at dmoore@eatright.org, or 800/877-1600, ext. 4837.