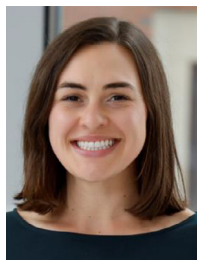


The Nutrition Workforce Gains Traction in Healthcare



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growing recognition and respect for the nutrition science workforce. Advances in nutrition research, such as precision nutrition, will support targeted medical nutrition therapy treatments, while expansion of “food is/as medicine” can support bridging the clinic-community gap. By improving and diversifying the nutrition pipeline, there will be expanded access to more equitable preventative services, and we could move one step closer to shifting the healthcare paradigm from treatment to prevention.

The critical role that nutrition plays in healthcare has been backed up by research time and again. However, it was not until recently that the US federal government gave sincere consideration to the nutrition workforce.¹ In September 2022, the White House Conference on Hunger, Nutrition, and Health—a national event focusing on ending hunger, reducing diet-related disease, and eliminating disparities—highlighted the significance of a diverse nutrition science workforce, including nutrition educators and researchers, to Americans’ well-being. Although media coverage was limited, the National Strategy² (Strategy) at the live conference is uplifting news for professionals actively involved in nutrition education and health promotion. We consider this federal action as recognition of the impact that nutrition professionals have on diet-related disease prevention and treatment, and an indicator of growing employment opportunities in the nutrition and health fields.

Notably, access to nutrition-related services is outlined in the Strategy. Certain professionals, such as registered dietitian nutritionists (RDNs), public health experts, and researchers from communities of color, are cited as having the ability to help expand access to nutrition-related services, indicating the critical role they play in advancing health equity. Collaboration between and integration of nutrition research and the health care workforce is also encouraged to ensure successful implementation of the Strategy. To achieve the

2030 goal set by the Biden-Harris Administration, it is clear that building the nutrition workforce is paramount. Meanwhile, this need draws attention to the recent changes that have been implemented for future nutrition professionals, specifically, RDNs who, starting in 2024, will be required to obtain a graduate degree.

The change approved by the Commission on Dietetic Registration and the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics (Academy) aims to provide graduates with greater depth of knowledge and skills for practice.^{3–7} Benefits of the change include negating the need for a separate dietetic internship and creating a unique opportunity for entry into the profession.⁸ While the eligibility change aligns with the trend observed in many health professions (e.g., physical therapists) in recent years,^{3–6} we want to emphasize equity and inclusion in building the nutrition workforce, particularly adequate representation of professionals from underserved communities. Fortunately, the need to improve diversity has been recognized by the Academy.^{9–11} To move toward a more diversified nutrition workforce, professionals from communities with a wide range of expertise are encouraged to work collaboratively to attract future nutrition professionals who are passionate about new areas of healthcare and meeting the increasingly diverse health and nutrition needs of Americans.

We foresee future advances in nutrition expanding science knowledge and access to healthcare, with

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