

# The Changing Landscape of Nutrition and Dietetics: A Specialty Group for Integrative and Functional Medicine

Kathie Madonna Swift, MS, RD, LDN

Kathie Madonna Swift, MS, RD, LDN is the Senior Nutrition Advisor for the Optimal Health and Prevention Research Foundation in San Diego, California. She also practices at the UltraWellness Center, in Lenox, Mass., the Kripalu Center for Yoga and Health, in Stockbridge, Mass., and is on the faculty at Saybrook University as an Instructor in the country's first graduate program in Mind Body Medicine. She serves on the editorial board for *Integrative Medicine: A Clinician's Journal*, has been a scientific reviewer for *Alternative Therapies in Health and Medicine* and co-authored *The Inside Tract: Your Good Gut Guide to Great Digestive Health* with Gerard Mullin, MD (Rodale Press, 2011).

Author correspondence: [kathie@swiftnutrition.com](mailto:kathie@swiftnutrition.com)

Traditional jobs in clinical nutrition where registered dietitians (RDs) serve inpatients in hospitals are yielding to growing opportunities in other practice settings as educators, clinicians, and nutritional genomics specialists.<sup>1</sup> The landscape of nutrition and dietetics is responding to the evolving challenges in health care today, and the strong increase in integrative RDs reflects this trend.

The American Dietetic Association (ADA) received its charter in 1917 and is the nation's largest organization of food and nutrition professionals. Now officially the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics,<sup>2</sup> the organization chose its new name to indicate its diversification beyond traditional clinical dietetics to embrace the broadening scope, variety, and number of settings in which highly skilled nutrition professionals operate. The Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics has created a number of specialty practice groups to meet the diverse needs and focus areas of its extensive membership, including a practice group for integrative RDs with approximately 3000 members. These RDs focus on the biological science of nutritional systems biology and the clinical application of integrative and functional medical practices.

## HISTORY

In 1998, a group of forward-thinking RDs interested in complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) created the Dietitians in Integrative and Functional Medicine's Dietetic Practice Group (DIFM DPG) of the ADA. Originally called the Nutrition in Complementary Care DPG (NCC DPG), its mission was the expansion of the RD's horizon and scope of practice to include alternative therapies that benefit the public seeking CAM modalities. The inaugural edition of the newsletter for NCC DPG's members covered topics such as traditional Chinese medicine, nutritional genomics, functional foods, antioxidants, and botanicals. Joseph Pizzorno, ND, the current editor in chief of *Integrative Medicine: A Clinician's Journal*, contributed an article that explored natural medicine. Also noteworthy was an article by Carol Coughlin, MS, RD, titled "Working With Clients and Practitioners of Integrative Medicine," in which the author remarked,

*Both clients and practitioners of integrative medicine want nutrition care and prefer credentialed providers, but many think*

*that dietetics professionals are not informed about, or interested in, this area of practice. . . actually, the combination of the RD credential and an understanding of integrative medicine is a winning combination.*<sup>3</sup>

In June 2009, NCC DPG officially petitioned the ADA to change its name to better reflect its members' skills and expertise in integrative and functional medicine. In August 2009, the NCC DPG formally changed its name to Dietitians in Integrative and Functional Medicine. DIFM DPG strives to improve the holistic health of America through the integrative and functional nutritional services that its members offer.

## CORE VALUES

The DIFM DPG's leaders created a strategic plan that clearly defined the group's mission and vision, which are rooted in the core values of integrity, innovation, and compassion.

**Vision.** To optimize health and healing through integrative practices in medical nutrition.

**Mission.** To empower members to be leaders in personalized genomics, holistic care, and functional nutrition therapies.<sup>4</sup>

The leaders also identified 3 critical goals of the organization's members: (1) to be valued as a trusted source in functional, holistic, and integrative care; (2) to increase the value of membership; and (3) to cultivate complementary relationships within the functional, holistic, and integrative communities.

## KEY INITIATIVES

Members of the DIFM DPG identified specific strategies to achieve these goals as well as a timeline for implementation. These strategies include disseminating information on the latest advances in nutritional genomics and related technologies, building collaborative partnerships, and developing a standard of practice and a specialist credential for integrative RDs, in addition to other goals aimed at expanding the integrative RD's role and relationships in a variety of health-care settings.

## Nutritional Genomics and Related Technologies

Integrative RDs receive continuing education in nutritional genomics, metabolomics, and systems biology. The web site <http://www.IntegrativeRD.org> provides a special section devoted to nutritional genomics, and the *IntegrativeRD* newsletter offers quarterly "SNIp updates" on genomics. In addition, webinars and research articles in the *Journal of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics* and other evidence-based publications address the topic. Nutritional genomics continues to be a major area of interest for integrative RDs, and the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics House of Delegates (HOD), which governs the profession and acts as the voice of Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics members, identified the topic as an issue of high importance.<sup>5</sup>

## Collaborative Partners

The DIFM DPG has committed to developing skillful and cooperative influence through collaboration with organizations that have mutually aligned goals and shared interests in excellence in integrative and functional medicine. Currently, these external networks include The Center for Mind-Body Medicine, the Institute for Functional Medicine, the American Botanical Council, the International Omega-3 Learning Education Consortium for Health and Medicine, the University of Arizona's Arizona Center for Integrative Medicine, and the International Society of Nutrigenetics and Nutrigenomics. Through these formal partnerships, DIFM DPG members can share cutting-edge information and take advantage of discounted symposia, webinars, newsletters, online courses, and other educational offerings.

In addition, the DIFM DPG has attracted individuals who are not RDs but who are interested in the education provided and in collaboration with the practice group. By becoming a non-RD member of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics and joining the DIFM DPG, credentialed professionals can share information and take advantage of some benefits, including the electronic mailing list. Through this interactive forum, members can make inquiries and share insights on topics such as leaky gut, dietary supplements, nutritional genomics, body-mind modalities, practice-based evidence, and other clinical pearls.

## Standards of Practice

The DIFM DPG has developed a series of standards of practice (SOPs) as well as the Standards of Professional Performance (SOPPs) for integrative RDs.<sup>6</sup> These core standards reflect the minimum competencies required for nutrition and dietetics practice and professional performance for integrative RDs at the generalist, specialist, and advanced levels. Effective scope of practice is clearly defined; however, the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics appreciates that a scope of practice needs to be flexible enough to reflect the evolution of knowledge over time, differing health-care environments, new technologies, and the levels of competency of individual practitioners and their particular practice settings.<sup>6</sup> The publication of the SOPs and SOPPs may serve as a stimulus for other professional groups, such as physicians and nurses, in the integrative and functional medicine communities to define competencies and scopes of practice to ensure the delivery of safe, evidence-based practices to the public seeking CAM therapies.

## Specialist Credentials

The Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics currently maintains board certifications for RDs in 5 specialties: renal nutrition, pediatric nutrition, sports dietetics, gerontological nutrition, and oncology nutrition.<sup>7</sup> The development of the SOPs and SOPPs for the DIFM DPG laid the groundwork for future board certification in integrative and functional nutrition (RD-CSIFN). This credential will ensure that integrative RDs have the knowledge, skills, and competencies to provide excellence in evidence-based nutrition services.

## Education and Practice

The DIFM DPG's leadership engages actively in a number of projects designed to enhance the education and future practice of credentialed nutrition practitioners. Three advanced RD clinicians

from the DIFM DPG created the Integrative and Functional Medical Nutrition Therapy Radial to serve as an educational template for RDs seeking to expand their knowledge and skills in this practice area. The radial integrates the nutrition-care process of assessment, diagnosis, intervention, monitoring, and evaluation and allows for the evaluation of complex interactions and interrelationships among diet, genes, and the environment.<sup>8</sup>

Integrative RDs have formal representation in the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics' HOD and can provide perspective in discussions impacting not only the practice of nutrition and dietetics but also the practice of integrative and functional medicine. The Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics Evidence Analysis Library<sup>9</sup> (EAL) provides a synthesis of relevant nutrition research on important questions about dietetic practice. At present, the content about CAM and integrative medicine within the EAL is limited. The DIFM DPG is committed to integrating the science of CAM and functional medicine into the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics' educational resources and research documents.

## A CALL TO COLLABORATION

The DIFM DPG is well positioned to play a key role in the creation of health through evidence-based, personalized, and integrative nutrition care. Integrative RDs are eager to partner and collaborate with other health-care providers to achieve a responsive, holistic health system. The DIFM DPG encourages integrative health-care providers to explore common ground and to cultivate effective partnerships. The current health-care climate is ripe for this collective undertaking.

Note: For further information about Dietitians in Integrative and Functional Medicine's Dietetic Practice Group, please refer to <http://www.IntegrativeRD.org> or contact the organization at [info@IntegrativeRD.com](mailto:info@IntegrativeRD.com).

## Acknowledgments:

The author thanks Ane Marie Kis, MS, RD, IntegrativeRD, HOD; Annie B. Kay, MS, RD, lead nutritionist, Kripalu Center for Yoga and Health; and Sharon McCauley, MS, MBA, RD, LDN, FADA, Director, Quality Management, Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, for their assistance.

## REFERENCES

1. Aase J. Make the most of your professional development portfolio. *J Am Diet Assoc*. 2009;109(7):1152-1154.
2. O'Malley R, MacMunn A. New name, same commitment to public's nutritional health: American Dietetic Association becomes Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics. Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics. <http://www.eatright.org/Media/content.aspx?id=6442465361>. Accessed April 5, 2012.
3. Pizzorno J. What is natural medicine? *Nutrition in Complementary Care Newsletter*. 1998;1(1):3.
4. DIFM DPG strategic plan. Pittsfield, MA: DIFM DPG; 2010. [http://www.integrativerd.org/ec/docs/DIFM\\_Strategic\\_PlanNov%202010%20FNCE.pdf](http://www.integrativerd.org/ec/docs/DIFM_Strategic_PlanNov%202010%20FNCE.pdf). Accessed April 5, 2012.
5. No authors listed. Proposed position concept: importance of nutritional genomics in dietetics. Dietitians in Integrative and Functional Medicine. [http://www.integrativerd.org/docs/HOD%20Nutr\\_Genomics\\_Proposal\\_Positon%20Paper\[1\].pdf](http://www.integrativerd.org/docs/HOD%20Nutr_Genomics_Proposal_Positon%20Paper[1].pdf). Accessed April 5, 2012.
6. The American Dietetic Association Quality Management Committee. American Dietetic Association Revised 2008 Standards of Practice for Registered Dietitians in Nutrition Care; Standards of Professional Performance for Registered Dietitians; Standards of Practice for Dietetic Technicians, Registered, in Nutrition Care; and Standards of Professional Performance for Dietetic Technicians, Registered. *J Am Diet Assoc*. 2008;108(9):1538-1542.
7. Pavlinac JM. Reward, recognition, remuneration: consider a specialty credential. *J Am Diet Assoc*. 2009;109(7):1144.
8. Redmond E, Swift K, Noland D. DIFM unveils the IFMNT radial. *DIFM Newsletter*. 2011;14(Summer Suppl):S1-S2.
9. Evidence Analysis Library. Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics. <http://adaevidenceclibrary.com>. Accessed April 5, 2012.