



A Quarter-Century of Transformation: The Recent History of Evolution at the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics

THE IDEA OF A PERMANENT association for dietetics was proposed at the October 1917 national meeting of dietitians in Cleveland, OH, where approximately 100 individuals of different practice backgrounds and hailing from 21 states and Canada met.¹ The Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics* now approaches its centennial celebration at the Food & Nutrition Conference & Expo (FNCE) in October as the largest dietetics-related association in the world, representing more than 100,000 credentialed practitioners, including registered dietitian nutritionists (RDNs), dietetic technicians, registered (NDTRs),† and other food and nutrition professionals and students from the United States and abroad.²

*Until 2012, the Academy was known as the American Dietetic Association. Throughout this article, it will be referred to as “the Academy.”

†The RDN and NDTR credentials were introduced in 2013 as credential options in addition to the use of RD and DTR. For consistency, this article will use RDN and NDTR throughout. For a history on these credential options, see “The Commission on Dietetic Registration: Ahead of the Trends for a Competent 21st Century Workforce” in the December 2016 issue of the *Journal* (2016;116(12):1981-1997.e7).

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Given that the attendees at the Cleveland meeting represented but a handful of practice spheres, and that the “Responsibilities of a Dietitian” as outlined at the 1919 Annual Meeting emphasized writing diets, purchasing supplies, and training staff, it’s within reason to assume that the growth of the profession couldn’t possibly have been conceived of 100 years ago. Today, the work of the Academy reflects an impressive evolution of the profession from humble roots to global leaders. And since 1917, the Academy has been the nucleus of this growth of the opportunities for, responsibilities of, and expectations of nutrition and dietetics practitioners.

In the past few years leading up to this centennial celebration, the *Journal* has published a series of articles detailing how the Academy has progressed and thrived in just the 25 years since *Carry the Flame*¹ was published. This article focuses on the past quarter-century’s growth at the association level.

THE IDENTITY OF A NATIONAL ORGANIZATION

The Academy adopted a new mission in 1992, one that emphasized serving the public through optimal nutrition and health. Creating a national and, later, international, identity for such a wide-ranging discipline continually evolves—as does the field of dietetics itself.

The Look

To strengthen the public image of the Academy and unify its members, a graphic organizational logo was introduced in 1987. This logo was considered the foundation for establishing visual identity and was to be used on all Academy communications, with use of the Academy seal reserved for ceremonial and traditional occasions.¹

In 2007, the Academy began to reevaluate the Academy’s identity, a

response to emerging popular perspective that shifting consumer demands required a stronger emphasis on building an external, public brand image.³ Given the looming possibility of health care reform, the Academy had what was called an “unprecedented opportunity to make [its] mark.”⁴ The Academy could redefine itself while bolstering the awareness of consumers, employers, administrators, and other health care professionals regarding the role and value of RDNs and NDTRs, who, as noted in a House of Delegates motion at its Spring 2007 meeting, are “the indispensable providers of food and nutrition services”—and the House of Delegates (HOD) identified multiple strategies for addressing this.

This strategy included the development of a new strategic plan, mission, and vision⁵ to project a desired future. It also established a critical new visual identity for the organization to reinforce perceptions of the Academy as a single, unified entity encompassing the Academy, including the Foundation, dietetic practice groups (DPGs), member interest groups, and committees.^{3,6}

The new approach to visual branding was based on the results of an intensive evaluation of the Academy’s visual identity and communications.⁶ This evaluation included the assessment of more than 600 printed communications (for visual harmony and style plus overall consistency and quality) and interviews with hundreds of stakeholders from Academy executives and staff to all DPG chairs, affiliate presidents, and Academy and Foundation board members. The intent of the new organizational identity program was to advance the

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American Dietetic Association

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The Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics' first-ever organizational logo, which was introduced in 1987 and bore the Academy's original name, the American Dietetic Association.

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The eatright logo, which was introduced in 2008 as part of an intensive visual identity campaign.

profession and deepen the awareness of and respect for RDNs and NDTRs by building professional demand for them while boosting unity, cohesiveness, and pride among members.⁶

The Name

At the 1917 meeting, the proposed name of the American Dietetic Association was approved unanimously. And for nearly a century, this name was retained.

During an early 1990s internal assessment of every facet of the association called The Strategic Thinking Initiative, the equity of the name "American Dietetic Association" was evaluated. Part of what made this process so exciting and extraordinary, for Beverly Bajus, chief operating officer of the Academy from 1991 to 1998 and who was named Honorary Member in 2014, was that "Members embraced the strategic plan with energy, enthusiasm, and action...We helped to broaden the scope of dietetics and nutrition's impact on the public's health by positioning the profession and preparing professionals for a much broader role in the future of health care and any aspect of nutrition." In late 1991, the association was newly focused on *nutrition* and began to consider if "American" was too self-limiting, since the mission was transforming to reflect serving the entire public, including the global community, says Bajus. Though a task force mostly focused on thoughtful consideration of incorporating the word

"nutrition," given its immediate recognition by media and consumers, the members still were not yet ready to embrace this change in the association's longstanding identity.⁷ "Ultimately these ideas were prescient to the later name change," says Bajus.

A renewed desire among leadership to rename the Academy in line with its modern vision and mission emerged in 2010. Deliberation focused on finding a new name that would quickly and accurately convey the Academy's identity—a name that would suggest a focus on wellness and prevention alongside the longstanding emphasis on nutrition therapy and would acknowledge members' science-based expertise.⁸ Thus, the American Dietetic Association was rebranded the

Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics: "Academy" replaced "Association" to celebrate that members are among a "society of learned persons organized to advanced science," "Nutrition" was added to communicate the message that RDNs are committed to improving the nation's health, and "Dietetics" was retained to describe the Academy's history as the world's largest organization of food and nutrition science practitioners.⁸ The name change was unveiled at the 2011 FNCE in San Diego, CA. After the new name was adopted into official use on January 1, 2012, it received widespread coverage in consumer, health care, and other professional media, including *The New York Times*, among many others (personal communication [e-mail], Patricia Babjak, Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics Chief Executive Officer).

TARGETING THE PUBLIC EYE

Promoting the work of RDNs and NDTRs is the primary purpose of the Academy, and building a public image has long been facilitated by a high-visibility commemoration of the profession. What began as three state governors proclaiming a "Dietitians' Week" in 1958 evolved to National Nutrition Week in 1973 and then, by HOD directive, National Nutrition Month in 1980, an annual celebration in March with a built-in opportunity to deliver nutrition messages to the public.^{1,9} In the 1970s, National Nutrition Week represented the Academy's "most successful attempt to reach the



American Dietetic Association



Figure 1. The 2009 National Nutrition Month logo, the first to incorporate the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics' new "eat right" branding.

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