



The Commission on Dietetic Registration: Ahead of the Trends for a Competent 21st Century Workforce



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THE ACADEMY OF NUTRITION and Dietetics* has always promoted the quality of education, experience, and lifelong learning as a requisite for membership and later translated to the dietetics credentialing. As early as 1919, just 2 years after the organization began, the leadership was discussing concerns about education and practice performance. To quote Lenna Frances Cooper, first vice president, "There is a need to distinguish between dietitians with a

**Until January 2012, the Academy was known as the American Dietetic Association; throughout this document, it will be called the Academy.*

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Supplementary materials: The CDR Timeline is available online at www.jandonline.org

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college degree and special training in some scientific work with the ones of lesser training. This would provide an incentive for better preparation and performance" (R. Yakel, RD, unpublished data, 1987). Numerous citations from the early years until today show that the development of the current credentialing program administered by the Commission on Dietetic Registration (CDR) continues the high standards of the Academy's founders.¹ The Academy continues today to be known as a leader among professional organizations in the development and continued strengthening of its credentialing programs.

Beginning in 1961, the House of Delegates (HOD) recommended that the Executive Board appoint a committee to study licensure, registration, and certification with a charge to review their definitions,[†] the pros and cons of each, and implications these would have to the total Academy membership.²

The committee, chaired by Ethel Downey, member of the Executive Board, presented their recommendations in 1967 indicating that voluntary registration of members would be the best path to meet the objectives (ie, education for excellence), not only in the primary development of dietitians, but also for the continuing competency of all dietetics practitioners.³

The entire membership was surveyed with an overwhelming positive response and approval of the principle of professional registration. Within a year the committee prepared the first Tentative Proposal on Registration, which was reviewed by the HOD and the Executive Board and sent to the membership for vote as an amendment to the Academy's constitution. The

amendment was approved by a tremendous positive response by the members to become effective June 1, 1969.⁴

During the first 5 years, the Committee on Professional Registration was dedicated to getting the initial "grandfather group" (for whom the test was waived) processed, defining and approving continuing education events, developing the exam (assisted by the Psychological Corporation of New York City),⁵ and devising the appeals process for denial and revocation of registration. Thus, began a successful credentialing program, which continues today to be at the forefront of professional competence and practice. Over the years there has been much progress, as discussed in the rest of this paper, but overall the original purpose of registration has remained steadfast: "upgrading professional competency by evidence of self-improvement through continuing education and maintenance of high standards of performance by individuals practicing in the profession of dietetics, thereby protecting the health, safety and welfare of the public."² An administratively autonomous credentialing body (Figure 1), the CDR maintains a separate budget and governing body of nationally elected registered dietitians (RDs); dietetics technicians, registered (DTRs); and public members. Although the Academy owns the CDR credentials, the Academy Bylaws provide CDR with "sole and independent authority" in setting standards, establishing fees, and finance and administration of activities related to certification, all in the interest of protecting the public.

Relative to the history of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, CDR is a fairly new entity. Created in 1969 as a

†The terms "registration" and "certification" are used interchangeably throughout the article.

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2010-2011	Riva Touger-Decker, PhD, RD, FADA
2011-2012	Barbara L. Grant, MS, RD, CSO
2012-2013	Annalynn Skipper, PhD, RD, FADA
2013-2014	Nancy H. Wooldridge, MS, RDN, LD
2014-2015	Kathryn K. Hamilton, MA, RDN, CSO, CDN, FAND
2015-2016	Kevin L. Sauer, PhD, RDN, LD
2016-2017	Kevin L. Sauer, PhD, RDN, LD

Figure 1. List of chairs of the Commission on Dietetic Registration from 1990 to 2016. The Commission has 12 members: 10 who are registered dietitian nutritionists (one of whom is newly credentialed, one of whom is a Board Certified Specialist, and one of whom is an RDN-AP [Registered Dietitian Nutritionist, Advanced Practice in Clinical Nutrition]); one nutrition and dietetics technician, registered; and one public representative.

voluntary registration managed by the Committee on Professional Registration, registration was separated from Academy membership in 1976 when the CDR replaced the Committee on Professional Registration.¹ Throughout those early years, the focus was on the quality of education, defining continuing education requirements, drafting the requirements for registration, developing an exam and recertification requirements, and certifying the

19,457 Academy Active members for whom the examination requirement was waived.¹ Strengthening the registration examination and recertification system, creation of the DTR credential (initiated in 1981 and realized in 1986), and a study of the potential for launching specialist certification dominated the years that followed.^{1,6}

As strategic governance in the 1990s transformed the Academy's gaze from inward on internal processes to

outward on consumer and legislative concerns,⁷ so too was CDR crafting its own strategic plans to shift its focus on market demands of the time. Internally, the increased attention then on health care reform in the United States led to the emergence of notable trends in credentialing—for example, specialization, a move to paperless systems, and modifying requirements to evaluate competency⁸—and it was no easy feat to stay on top of all these new developments.

Externally, strengthening brand recognition of the RD and DTR credentials has been a long-term work in progress within the profession. In the view of the 6,381 individuals who responded to the 2012 Needs Satisfaction Survey,⁹ consistent with the results of the 2008 Needs Assessment survey,¹⁰ employment and consumer market concerns that had loomed and waned since the mid-1990s were among the most critical issues affecting the profession. In the decades that followed, these concerns have not diminished; an HOD background paper to detail the 2011 Future Connections Summit on Dietetic Practice, Credentialing, and Education noted the common, and persistent, perception among practitioners that marketplace recognition of RD and DTR credentials was lacking, competition from noncredentialed professionals was a concern, and reimbursement and compensation were perceived as less than ideal. CDR's decision in 2013 to move the degree requirement for eligibility to take the entry-level registration examination for dietitians from a baccalaureate degree to a graduate degree and the establishment of expanded advanced practice roles will assist in enhancing public protection, practitioner competence, credibility, and compensation.

CDR has met every impetus for change and each challenge head-on. CDR was one of the first credentialing agencies to implement computer-based testing in 1999. This innovative assessment system provided CDR registration candidates with many benefits, including year-round testing and immediate score reporting. Both of these features facilitated employment of nutrition and dietetics practitioners soon after graduation.

When the Institute of Medicine (IOM) compelled health professions to emphasize quality and competence,

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