

Letter to the Editor

It is time for the field of dietetics to invest in the future of our profession

Dear Dr. Hill,

There is a decided gap in the literature in the area of educational programs for dietetic interns. Further, those responsible for planning and managing these programs often lack training or experience in the field of education. Currently used curricula and programming are out of touch with current technology and are not supported by adult educational theory and practice.

In order to become a dietitian in the United States, a graduate of a Didactic Program in Dietetics (DPD) must complete a Dietetic Internship (DI) program to be eligible to take the national board registration examination. Depending on the program, these internships vary somewhat in length and concentration. Nonetheless, each must provide at least 1200 hours of supervised practice in areas ranging from clinical practice, management, food service, public health, wellness, and other specialty areas. Most DI programs also incorporate an element of didactic work to supplement and prepare the intern for practicum experiences.

Dietetics is a truly unique field which incorporates medical knowledge, proficiency in counseling, culinary expertise, and a host of other skills, resulting in a competency framework unlike any other field. Although DI programs are tasked with preparing interns for an evidence-based profession which is constantly advancing and evolving, there is a paucity of research regarding the educational techniques utilized in preparing interns to become competent health professionals. The program managers and planners are at the front lines of optimizing the DI program. They may be juggling multiple areas of responsibility such as clinical coverage or personnel management in addition to educational responsibilities, and more importantly, they lack the knowledge and resources to design evidence-based programming for interns.

An informal PubMed search using the term “dietetic intern” yielded 15 results. Seven of these were not related to educating dietetic interns. One was published in a nursing journal, and the balance were published 25 or more years ago. It is time for the field of dietetics to invest in the future of our profession – a quality, evidence based educational foundation for dietetic interns. We can do this by promoting and publishing research on this topic and providing program managers with the evidence and tools needed to continue to improve their programming.

Sincerely,

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