

## THE ROLE OF THE REGISTERED DIETITIAN

### Who are registered dietitians?

Registered dietitians (RDs) are indispensable providers of food and nutrition services. The expertise of the RD is essential in promoting optimal nutrition, health and well-being among the public. RDs are part of a multidisciplinary health care team. They are responsible for integrating nutrition plans into the larger patient or client treatment plan.

The Institute of Medicine (IOM) identifies registered dietitians as qualified professionals for nutrition therapy. According to the IOM “the registered dietitian is currently the single identifiable group of health care professionals with standardized education, clinical training, continuing education, and national credentialing requirements necessary to be directly reimbursed as a provider of nutrition therapy.”

### What vital health care services do registered dietitians provide?

RDs provide a nutrition assessment, determine the nutrition diagnosis, determine and implement a nutrition intervention, and then in subsequent visits monitor and evaluate the patient’s progress. Nutrition education for disease prevention and nutrition counseling (MNT) for chronic conditions provided over a series of visits are essential components of a comprehensive health care program. MNT provided by RDs can improve a consumer's health and well-being, and increase productivity and satisfaction levels through decreased doctor visits, hospitalizations and reduced prescription drug use.

### What are the education and professional requirements for registered dietitians?

Registered dietitians complete the following education and training to meet credentialing requirements:

- Complete a minimum of a bachelor’s degree at a US regionally accredited university or college and course work approved by the Commission on Accreditation for Dietetics Education (CADE) of the American Dietetic Association.
- Complete a CADE-accredited, supervised practice program at a healthcare facility, community agency, or a foodservice corporation, or combined with undergraduate or graduate studies. Typically, a practice program will run six to twelve months in length.
- Pass a national examination administered by the Commission on Dietetic Registration (CDR).
- Complete continuing professional educational requirements to maintain registration.

Approximately 50% of RDs hold advanced degrees. Some RDs also hold additional certifications in specialized areas of practice, such as pediatric or renal nutrition, nutrition support, and diabetes education. Many states have regulatory laws for dietitians. Frequently these state requirements are met through the same education and training required to become an RD.

### How do registered dietitians provide care?

Registered dietitians provide quality care based on evidence-based nutrition practice guidelines and protocols, and clinical judgment skills.

