ADA Partnering with the Alliance Healthcare Initiative

The American Dietetic Association is one of several participants involved in the Alliance Healthcare Initiative, a landmark event in the prevention, assessment and treatment of childhood obesity. A component of the Initiative includes children and families’ access to nutrition counseling provided by RDs. Here are the details of the program.

Q: Why is ADA involved in this initiative?
This initiative directly aligns with the American Dietetic Association’s strategic plan and policy priorities which target children’s nutrition and obesity, overweight, and healthy weight management. It reinforces ADA’s vision -- to optimize the nation’s health through food and nutrition. According to ADA President Marty Yadrick, “The Alliance Healthcare Initiative is a wonderful opportunity for ADA RD members to positively impact children’s health. ADA is proud to be a part of this effort.”

Q: What does the nutrition component of this initiative entail?
Children and their families will have access to a minimum of 4 visits with a registered dietitian for nutrition counseling services such as medical nutrition therapy. The medical eligibility for the new coverage is children 3-18 years old. The nutrition services will be coordinated with visits provided by the child’s primary care physician. RDs who participate in the program must use the ADA Evidence-based Pediatric Weight Management Nutrition Practice Guideline when providing nutrition care to children.

Q: What payer groups are involved in the Initiative?
Several health insurance organizations are part of this ground-breaking effort, including Aetna, Blue Cross and Blue Shield of North Carolina, Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts and WellPoint. Major corporations including Houston Independent School District, Owens Corning and Paychex are participating as customers of Aetna. PepsiCo also has joined the Alliance to offer these benefits. And, the William J. Clinton Foundation and American Heart Association will also offer these benefits to their employees. In addition to coverage that is available in Massachusetts and North Carolina, through the respective Blue Cross and Blue Shield companies for those states, the Alliance Healthcare Initiative for children will also be available in many other states where the participating employers and health insurance organizations will offer the services. Specific information on the locations where the targeted groups will have access to the new obesity coverage will be posted on the ADA Web page once program details are available.

Q: How will RDs be recruited to join the program?
ADA and its affiliate associations will help disseminate information to RDs to encourage participation in the Initiative. In addition, ADA will disseminate broader communications to its entire membership to educate RDs about the benefit and inspire demand. ADA staff are communicating with the payers to clarify each specific group’s coverage details and procedures for RDs who are interested in becoming credentialed (enrolled) as providers. ADA is also gathering details for RDs who are already credentialed providers with the respective payers involved in the Alliance Healthcare Initiative procedures for initiating and billing the covered nutrition visits. Information will be distributed to the affiliate dietetic associations and dietetic practice groups so RD members in the areas where the benefit is available will have access to details about the new coverage and enrollment/credentialing information.
Q: How can registered dietitians help expand the Initiative?  
Registered dietitians across the country can get involved by recruiting insurers and employers in their community to sign on to the Alliance Healthcare agreement and become part of the solution of the childhood obesity epidemic. RDs can find more information regarding this collaborative effort at www.healthiergeneration.org/healthcare and encourage interested insurers and employers to learn more about this groundbreaking agreement by emailing the Alliance for a Healthier Generation at healthcare@healthiergeneration.org. The Alliance and ADA hope the program will expand beyond the current payers and employers who are currently involved. As ADA learns more information about expansion of the program, information will be posted on the Web at www.eatright.org/alliance.

Q: What can registered dietitians do now to prepare for participation in the Initiative?  
While waiting for program and provider enrollment details, ADA encourages RDs to review and become familiar with the ADA Pediatric Weight Management Nutrition Practice Guideline, since participation in the program requires use of the guideline as part of the RD’s nutrition counseling visits. ADA RD members can review the nutrition practice guideline from the Evidence Analysis Library at: http://www.adaevidencelibrary.com. In addition, RDs can go to www.eatright.org/alliance where new resources related to the initiative are being posted all the time.

Q: What resources does ADA have available for helping to treat overweight children and teens?  
In addition to the Pediatric Weight Management Nutrition Practice Guideline that RDs must use as part of their participation in the Initiative, ADA has several other patient education resources available. The new Counseling Overweight and Obese Children and Teens: Health Care Reference and Client Education Handouts includes the latest recommendations from the Expert Committee on Assessment, Prevention and Treatment of Child and Adolescent Overweight and Obesity. This guide shows RDs how to tailor and provide appropriate nutrition counseling for overweight and obese children and adolescents between the ages of 5 and 18. Detailed counseling plans, practical counseling tips, take-home handouts and interactive worksheets are included.

The Commission on Dietetic Registration offers a Certificate of Training in Childhood and Adolescent Weight Management to RDs and DTRs. This program increases practitioners’ knowledge of obesity and management options to enable long-term patient compliance and sustained success, and reviews care coordination for when and how to refer patients to other specialists. For information go to: http://www.cdrnet.org/wtmgmt/childhood.htm.

Additional obesity resources for RDs to consider using in their nutrition counseling visits will be posted to the web at: www.eatright.org/alliance.

Watch for more details distributed to RDs in states where the Pediatric Obesity Initiative will occur.