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Guide to Using the Nutrition and Dietetics Career Development Scenarios



The Nutrition and Dietetics Career Development Scenarios were developed to put the Career Development Guide into context. Practitioners, students and educators can use these scenarios to explore possible routes to achieve their career goals. Many of these scenarios are based on real practitioners, and they represent a variety of career trajectories.

Scenario 1: Becoming Proficient in a Focus Area of Practice, taking time off to start a family, and achieving advanced practice

Scenario 2: Clinical practitioner to advanced practice management

Scenario 3: Advanced practice clinical practitioner

Scenario 4: Combined internship/master's program to clinical practitioner to advance practice in dietetics education

Scenario 5: Clinical Generalist, completes graduate degree while working

Scenario 6: Completing a coordinated program and eventually becoming proficient in management and community nutrition

Scenario 7: Combined DTR/culinary arts program to Assistant Food Service Director

Scenario 8: Clinical Practitioner at the Proficient level

Scenario 9: Completing AA and eventually MPH degree and achieving Competent level in Community Nutrition

Scenario 10: Completing a public health internship while working as a full-time employee and advancing a career in public health.

Scenario 11: DPD graduate entering pathway III to become a NDTR then reapplying to an internship and becoming a RDN

After exploring these career scenarios, educators, practitioners and students are encouraged to develop their own career scenarios.

- Consult the Career Development Guide to determine what skills and knowledge are needed to move onto the next level of practice.

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- Review the scenarios to see how these practitioners reacted to different educational or life circumstances that allowed them to continue their careers in dietetics.
- Other scenarios can be developed to show how different dietetics practitioners progressed through their careers.
- It is important to note that not all dietetics practitioners will achieve the level of expert or advanced practice.

MAKING THE DIETETICS CAREER DEVELOPMENT GUIDE COME ALIVE

Navigating Career Changes

Scenario #1: Entering into the field with a master's degree in the focus area of pediatrics, moving into a specialist role, taking a pause in career for a family and then re-entering as a specialist and moving toward advanced practice.

Competent Level

Linda was enrolled in a Home Economics (HE) program. Six majors were available in her college, including textiles and dietetics. To receive a bachelor of science degree in home economics, an HE student was required to take freshman and sophomore requirements in all of the majors and then pick one major to specialize for the junior and senior year. At first, Linda was undecided as to whether to major in textiles or dietetics, ultimately choosing textiles.

Upon graduation, Linda moved to a small rural town where her boyfriend was employed. Job opportunities in textiles or home economics were unavailable, so Linda began to investigate two small community colleges for "add-on" skills/coursework. However, after one year, her circumstances changed and she moved back to her home town where she had attended college.

She decided to pursue dietetics as a career, because employment possibilities were higher for registered dietitians. Linda enrolled in the classes needed to meet the Commission on Accreditation for Dietetics Education's requirements and obtained information on cost and timing to seek registration eligibility.

Linda's choices were to finish her baccalaureate requirements and apply for an internship, apply for the college Coordinate Program (CP) or begin a master's program in nutrition education and complete a six month work study (individual self written/planned internship, not available at present but alternative pathway being considered). Linda also applied for all student assistance available and was ecstatic to receive an offer for a master's-level teaching assistantship. Linda earned her master's degree in nutrition education and was able to secure her individual internship/work study at a children's hospital. Linda found pediatrics fascinating and decided to work in child nutrition programs.

Focus Area of Practice

After successfully finishing the ACEND requirements and passing the RDN exam, Linda got a position at the local Women, Infant Children Nutrition Program (WIC) as the County Nutrition Education Coordinator. After 2½ years with the WIC agency, a Dietitian I position opened in the outpatient department at the children's hospital where she had trained.

Linda worked in all the specialty clinics at the children's hospital, gaining in-depth experience in pediatric medical nutrition therapy. She also became very active with several of the health-care teams. After three

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years, Linda decided to apply to sit for the Commission on Dietetic Registration Board Certified Examination in Pediatric Nutrition to more closely parallel with the other health-care team disciplines. Linda became the first Certified Specialist in Pediatrics Nutrition (CSP) at the children's hospital.

Proficient Level

Linda was asked by the oncologist with whom she worked in an outpatient clinic to move full-time into the inpatient chemo clinic to see hospital patients along with those in the oncology private clinics and Linda accepted. During the next three years, Linda developed many skills and treatment modalities. She also married, decided to start her family and went part-time (16 hours a week) with one of the outlying private oncology clinics. This arrangement allowed her to maintain practice hours to retake the Pediatric Specialist exam. Linda also started to study and complete self-education courses to take the American Society for Parenteral and Enteral Nutrition's Certified Nutrition Support Dietitian (CNSD) exam, which she did in the next three years while expanding her family. Linda practiced part-time in the oncology clinic while maintaining her CSP and CNSD and working freelance with the oncologist to develop nutrition treatment/practice guidelines.

Expert Level

When the oncologist asked her to head up data collection to be submitted to a pediatric cancer outcomes databank, Linda returned to full-time practice. She did this for three years while simultaneously completing a master of health care quality management degree. The physicians in the oncology practice joined into a national cooperative organization to establish practice guidelines. Linda was asked to relocate to the main office of this newly formed organization to represent her private oncology practice. After two years she was asked to take the national practice guideline administrator position.

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MAKING THE DIETETICS CAREER DEVELOPMENT GUIDE COME ALIVE **A Career in Management**

Scenario #2: Beginning a career in dietetics after internship (entry-level) as a clinical dietitian, moving to foodservice management as a competent dietitian, enrolling in a master's degree program for an executive MBA to become a proficient dietitian, advancing into leadership roles as the assistant food service director and internship director and finally achieving a director's position as an advanced-practice RDN.

Competent Level

Immediately following his internship, Sam worked as a clinical dietitian in a small hospital. After three years in this job, the position of assistant food service director opened in a larger medical center; he applied and was selected to fill the position.

Two years later, Sam began work on an executive MBA degree and completed it in two years. He applied to be the assistant food service director and internship director at the medical center: He enjoyed food service management and wanted to continue in that focus area of practice, but also wanted to expand his skills by working with a dietetic internship.

Proficient Level

During the next five years, Sam developed and successfully implemented a plan to increase interns' pass rate on the RDN exam. This involved a restructuring of rotations and learning experiences, training new and existing preceptors and upgrading the didactic components of the program. At the same time, he contributed to a number of cost-saving measures in the food and nutrition services department. The employees respected his knowledge and ability to help them solve problems. Sam was skilled at helping them explore alternative solutions and develop independence in their various roles. He also established excellent working relationships with directors of other departments in the medical center and participated in multi-departmental quality improvement projects.

Expert Level

When the director of food and nutrition services retired two years ago, Sam moved into that position and is now the director of food and nutrition services at the 750-bed medical center. His staff includes two administrative RDNs, the dietetic internship director, the clinical nutrition manager and nine clinical RDNs, two dietetic technicians, eight foodservice supervisors, as well as the food production, service and sanitation employees. Sam has already implemented innovative changes resulting in higher patient satisfaction scores and is working with the food and nutrition services team to redesign the employee/visitor cafeteria service. He serves on several committees at the medical center and holds an elected office in the Association for Healthcare Foodservice.

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Career in Clinical Dietetics

Scenario #3: Beginning as a registered dietitian from an internship into a clinical outpatient hospital setting (entry-level), moving into a focus area of practice and securing the Certified Diabetes Educator (CDE) credential, entering into advanced practice with a dual master's degree and accomplishing many research, practice and grant oriented endeavors.

Advanced Beginner/Competent Level and Focus Area of Practice

Jennifer completed her dietetic internship and successfully obtained the RDN credential. She began working in a hospital outpatient diabetes center as the clinical dietitian. Jennifer began to develop her knowledge and skills related to diabetes care through her interactions with the diabetes management team.

Proficient Level

After five years, Jennifer decided to pursue the CDE credential and successfully passed the exam. She continued to provide diabetes self management education to all her patients and worked with the physicians, nurses and Endocrinologists to help patients manage their diabetes. She provided diabetes counseling, monitored and evaluated patients and developed nutrition care plans. She participated in diabetes management team meetings and served on clinical service committee meetings for quality assurance.

Jennifer decided to pursue a dual master's degree in community nutrition and public health administration. She started to write both research and non-research grants. She was awarded several grants from federal, state and private agencies to do research in diabetes management as well as to expand the diabetes center to provide services that include screening for pre-diabetes and education on diabetes prevention.

Expert Level

Jennifer was promoted to director of the diabetes center. She supervises a team of 10 registered dietitians, four registered nurses who are certified diabetes educators and 20 community workers. Most of the community workers assist in organizing and facilitating educational events for the potential clients in the actual communities they serve.

After 18 years of practice, Jennifer decided to sit for the board certification examination for advanced diabetes management (BC-ADM) which she passed. Jennifer has published several diabetes research articles in peer-reviewed journals and has expanded the diabetes center to include a weight management program for overweight patients and a healthy lifestyle and nutrition program for gestational diabetes patients. The center has also employed a nurse midwife who is a CDE and an exercise specialist to work with Jennifer in this program.

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Career in Dietetics Education

Scenario #4: Starting career with a combined internship/master's program, working in a clinical practice setting concentrating on diabetes (advanced beginner starting with a focus area in practice) and changing to dietetics education in advanced practice.

Advanced Beginner/Competent Level and Focus Area of Practice

Sean obtained a bachelor's degree in nutrition and dietetics and completed a combined dietetic internship/master's program. After passing the Commission on Dietetic Registration RDN exam, Sean began working as a clinical dietitian at a major medical center. He was the general medicine dietitian for 10 years, developing a focus area in HIV/AIDS care.

Proficient Level

Sean obtained and implemented several grants related to nutrition intervention in HIV/AIDS, then published and presented the results of several studies conducted using the grant monies. He served as a preceptor to a dietetic internship and was a team leader for the inpatients dietitians at the medical center.

Expert Level

Sean completed a PhD in higher education leadership and obtained a faculty position at a state university where he has worked for fifteen years, earned tenure and is a full professor.

Sean's area of expertise is medical nutrition therapy. He teaches diet therapy to undergraduate and graduate students, applying research in the classroom setting, and has won several teaching awards. Sean obtains multiple grants on the impact of nutrition intervention on the management of HIV/AIDS. He publishes and presents his research and is considered an expert in HIV/AIDS nutrition research and practice.

Sean is active in the dietetics profession. He is a reviewer for a clinical practice journal, past president of the state dietetic association, former chair of the Dietetic Educators of Practitioners DPG, a current site visitor for the Accreditation Council for Education in Nutrition and Dietetics (ACEND) and serves in the Academy's House of Delegates.

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Career as a Generalist in Dietetics

Scenario #5: After an internship, entering into the profession in a city hospital and rotating through most clinical positions. Then, expanding into the proficient level by seeking a master's program to strengthen medical nutrition knowledge to achieve a higher level of practice as a clinical "generalist."

Advanced Beginner/Competent Level

Elizabeth received her undergraduate degree in food and nutrition with aspirations to work in a clinical setting, helping patients with their health and nutrition. She finished the internship which provided experiences in most aspects of dietetics practice.

Elizabeth's first job was in a hospital in the city of her alma mater. She had responsibility for patients in the cardiology and oncology units and shared coverage for the other three RDNs in all areas of the hospital including nutrition support and pediatrics. Elizabeth quickly found most physicians and nurses were supportive of her recommendations and she enjoyed her work. However, she felt uncomfortable because she had to rely on other individuals and resources for more detailed clinical application. She tried to keep up with the literature and understand what she could from her experiences but realized she needed and wanted to: learn more about the underlying pathology and physiology of the broad spectrum of problems she was dealing with; be able to better relate and apply findings of clinical studies; and base her recommendations on sound evidence-based science.

Proficient Level

Elizabeth sought advice from a graduate advisor at her university and talked to him about her goals. With his guidance, she applied to a program to obtain a master's of science degree in nutrition. Elizabeth tailored her studies to fulfill the knowledge and skills she needed to advance in her position at the hospital.

Her program included coursework in physiology, applied biochemistry/metabolism, applied statistics and epidemiology, basic pathophysiology, advanced clinical nutrition and motivational based counseling. Her studies also included seminar classes in which she and her classmates would present an evidence-based analysis of important studies in the literature. The last component was a non-thesis project. Elizabeth was able to take some of the courses online and some on campus.

Expert Level

Elizabeth completed her degree in three years while still employed as a 0.75 FTE with some financial support from her department. She gained confidence in her ability to interpret medical data from the literature and to understand the significance of assessment data. Elizabeth soon began to make more contributions to the development of assessment and treatment protocols for many of the hospital clinical areas, develop educational materials for patients with clear explanations of the role and limitations of the dietary interventions for different disease states and coordinate services in a medical home model with

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home care agencies. Elizabeth recently was contacted by her hospital network alliance hospitals to begin to update their assessment and treatment protocols.

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Scenario #6: Entering the field of dietetics and nutrition through a coordinated program, completing a master's degree, moving into education and completing a doctorate degree while obtaining proficient skills at the college professor level, expanding and broadening communication and university program skills for a state appointed position on the state university commission.

Advanced Beginner/Competent Level

Ellen obtained her RDN from a coordinated program and after practicing for three years decided to seek a master's degree. She became intrigued by her university's system for students preparing to become registered dietitians. This led her to pursue a doctorate. Her goal was to develop a program that trained minority students in dietetics who then went on to complete an internship in a rural area clinic.

Proficient Level

Ellen began at a local community college and went on to a state university where she gained skills in university operations, funding, community relations and joint state and university programming. She began to develop her concept for a rural-focused degree and training, which became a reality after 10 years. She soon had requests at the university level to consider expanding her rural education program to a broader student base.

Expert Level

Ellen sought cooperation with the medical school and successfully developed a residency program for allied health professionals in rural health, which included registered dietitians. She received prestigious national recognition for her program from the president of the United States, who wants this model of rural medical services replicated.

Ellen is the director of the family and consumer sciences programs at the state level for the governor's state university commission. She was recommended and appointed for this position because of her many years of experience at the university level in program planning, implementation and evaluation of programs in family and child development, nutrition, diet and health, food safety, home food preservation, food preparation, consumer sciences and personal financial management. She was specifically sought because of her innate ability to coordinate several professionals into creating successful outcomes for the community.

Multiple Career Development Guide

Ellen has dual helixes because she is capable in the following:

- Proficient in focus area of practice for community nutrition and management.
- Experienced in the training of RDNs and NDTRs who wish to be state leaders.
- Directed a dietetic internship program and increased the number of minorities.
- Advanced the number of RDNs in rural areas.
- Participated as a member of health care team to reduce the risk of chronic disease in her state.
- Directed a multi-disciplined prevention program in the patient centered, medical home model.

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Career as a Nutrition and Dietetic Technician, Registered

Scenario #7: Starting as a food service manager at a local restaurant chain completing a dietetic technician/chef combined degree program at the community college, moving to the competent level of practice in a large university food service operation as an assistant food service director and becoming proficient when the job was merged into food service product controller for the university.

Advanced Beginner/Competent Level

Ben loved working in kitchens and producing menus, purchasing food supplies and enhancing the food service environment. When he finished his dietetic technician degree, he became registered and applied for food service positions in his home town. Ben was in the right place at the right time when one of his instructors from his community college changed jobs and began to work as the assistant vice president of off campus contract services which included the entire food service system. His previous teacher interviewed Ben and offered him a position as an assistant food service director at the smallest dormitory food service production in the community college.

Ben thrived in his new position, asking to be trained in a variety of the required areas of the university food service system. He soon moved into a relief position where he covered for all of the other food service directors when they were on leave/vacation. Ben was especially partial to procurement and contract arrangements with suppliers and inventory control. He was asked several times by the assistant vice president to present his opinion on the quality of purveyors and supplies.

Proficient Level

After working at the university for ten years, Ben applied for the newly created Food Service Product Controller position and got the job after four rounds of interviews. He became well-known consistently for being under budget. The food service in the dining halls increased in customer satisfaction and revenue for the first time in six years. Ben was recognized for his accomplishments by the university president as the employee of the year during the yearly presentation to the university employees.

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Career in Clinical Dietetics

Scenario #8: Working while going to college for six years, working a year as a nutrition aide before an internship, beginning as one of two RDNs in a small Asian community hospital with an outpatient clinic staying at the proficient level for several years because of commitment to the job, currently unsure of what to do about higher education and focus area.

Advanced Beginner/Competent Level

Mei-li worked in the college work study program while completing her bachelor's degree in dietetics. Because she was responsible for funding her education and had limited government loans, she could only take classes part-time. Mei-li enjoyed this pace for learning because English was not her first language. After graduating, Mei-li worked for one year as a nutrition aide at one of the city hospitals to pay some of her loans. She was successful in obtaining an internship at the same hospital where she was employed. Upon completing the internship and passing her RDN exam, Mei-li searched for a hospital that serves an Asian community. The Huang Zhi Regional Hospital hired Mei-li to work as the inpatient and outpatient clinical RDN.

Proficient Level

Mei-li has worked at this hospital for 10 years and enjoys the myriad of patients and disease states that she sees. She is considering furthering her education but she would have to support herself and pay for graduate school. Mei-li has delayed application because she cannot make a decision as what degree she would seek and enjoys success at her present job. Her performance appraisals have all been at the highest level and the administration is quite pleased with Mei-li and her communication with the patients. Mei-li has kept up her skills and interest in the clinical arena by taking a variety of online disease specific continuing education programs and signs up for at least two to three webinars yearly. Mei-li is interested in going back to earn a master's degree, but has not set a timeline for this to occur.

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Career in Community Nutrition

Scenario #9: Entering education pathway while in high school with community college courses, completing an AA and later completing a bachelor's degree with focus on nutrition and dietetics, completing a dietetic internship and graduate school in public health. Working initially in a clinical setting and is now employed in an extension program as a Farm to School Coordinator.

Advanced Beginner/Competent Level

As a senior in high school, Stephanie started at the Community and Technical College in the post-secondary program. Instead of transferring to a four-year university in her second year, she made the decision to complete an associate's degree as a part of the State Transfer Curriculum program.

After earning her AA degree, Stephanie started at the University. She knew she was interested in the health field but was unsure at that time what to major in. The first semester she majored in biology. However, after a semester, she knew biology was too broad in scope and she started looking into other courses and majors.

While researching the various majors, Stephanie found the College of Continuing Education and the Inter-College Program with individualized majors. She began her spring semester with the intent to earn a bachelor's degree in health and wellness. After completing an introduction to nutrition course, she decided to pursue a major in nutrition. Stephanie completed the didactic program in nutrition and dietetics.

Stephanie applied for graduate programs and dietetic internships during the final year of her DPD program. She was accepted into two graduate programs, including one that offered a coordinated graduate option. Stephanie decided to pursue the graduate degree in public health nutrition that offered a coordinated program option so that she could complete the supervised practice as part of her degree program. She passed the RDN examination within weeks of completing her coordinated graduate program in public health nutrition.

Stephanie initially took a part-time position as nutrition and wellness coach at an outpatient community health center. Within a year, she obtained a full time position as a Nutrition Education Specialist with the University Extension SNAP-Ed program where she was able to plan, implement and evaluation nutrition education programs for residents of her metropolitan area, at the local level.

Proficient Level

After two years as a Nutrition Education Specialist, Stephanie was promoted to become a Nutrition Education Coordinator. In this role she assumed responsibility for planning, implementing and evaluation SNAP-Ed programs for the county including managing the budget and assisting with grant writing activities. Stephanie was responsible for convening county-level coalitions related to food assistance programs. She also served on state-level committees related to food insecurity and food assistance programs. Stephanie supervised a small staff of Community Health Workers and developed a mentoring

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program for recruiting young volunteers from the local community college to become involved in SNAP-Ed programming. She became active in local and state professional organizations and was particularly active in the state affiliate Public Policy Committee and the metropolitan area Hunger Coalition.

Expert Level

Almost 10 years after taking her initial position with University Extension, Stephanie was promoted to become the SNAP-Ed Program Director. She supervised local- and county-level nutritionists, developed and managed budgets for SNAP-Ed programs, wrote grants for state and national funding to expand the reach of current nutrition education initiatives, and convened and led state coalitions to improve food security in her state. Stephanie collaborated with nutritionists from the state departments of education and health to obtain funding to design, implement and evaluate policy and systems changes to local after school, summer and community center-based childcare programs to incorporate nutrition education, gardening and food preparation and tasting activities. She became active in national professional groups and received a state-level honor for her work in reducing food insecurity.

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Career in Public Health

Scenario #10: Starting career as nutrition associate in WIC and later completing an employer paid internship. Working initially in WIC clinics and advancing to coordinator and education director.

Advanced Beginner/Competent Level and Focus Area of Practice

Keisha obtained a bachelor's degree in nutrition and dietetics but due to having difficulty with chemistry did not have the grade point average to be accepted into an internship. During one of her clinical experiences she worked in the WIC program and really enjoyed that. Her faculty mentor identified a state WIC program that had an internship program as part of employment. She applied and was employed as a Nutrition Associate in a WIC clinic. One she had a year work experience; she was accepted into the internship. She was allowed to remain a full time employee (with benefits) but during internship blocks only worked part time. She completed all the internship requirements in 15 months and passed the RDN exam. One of the requirements of the program was that once the internship was completed, that she was required to work for 3 years for the agency or she would have to pay back the cost for the internship. Since Keisha enjoyed the job, this was not a problem. After obtaining her RDN, she was promoted to clinic WIC coordinator.

Proficient Level

Because of her interest in preventing childhood obesity, she worked with the state office to develop an obesity prevention initiative grant. The grant was funded and she became the nutrition coordinator for this grant. She was able to develop statewide initiatives that targeted obesity prevention and interventions. She continued to enjoy public health, but knew to advance in the field she would need to obtain a master's degree. She found an on-line MPH and enrolled. Her employer agreed to pay for one course a semester.

Expert Level

After completing her MPH, she successfully applied for WIC nutrition education coordinator at the state. She was selected as the State's representative to Association of State Public Health Nutritionists (ASPHN) and served on the MCH Nutrition Council. She served on the MCH Nutrition Council which was part of ASPHN. She knew she needed to develop leadership skills if she wanted to advance in her career. She applied and was accepted into the Maternal and Child Health Bureau (MCHB) funded Nutrition Training Grant leadership program for year-long Emerging Public Health Leadership. Although much of the work for this program was done on her own time, she developed leadership skills that allowed her to advance in her public health career.

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DPD Graduate Entering Pathway III and Eventually Becoming an RDN

Novice

Maria began college as a pre-med major, determined to become a cardiologist. She shadowed a cardiologist as part of a pre-med seminar course and began to wonder if medical school was right for her because it was focused on treatment rather than prevention, which is what she hoped to focus on in her career. Maria enrolled in an undergraduate nutrition course as an elective and decided to switch her major to nutrition and dietetics as this would allow her to focus on health promotion and disease prevention. After completing her DPD program and receiving her verification statement, Maria applied to several internships in her area but did not match with any of her choices.

Maria's dietetic mentor encouraged her to complete Pathway 3 by taking the Dietetic Technician Registered (DTR) examination. Maria successfully passed the DTR exam and became credentialed as a Nutrition and Dietetic Technician, Registered (NDTR). She was hired as a part-time nutritionist for low-risk clients in a local Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC) program. A few months later Maria began another part-time position as a nutrition and wellness coach for a local employee wellness program. She also started writing short newsletter articles for the wellness program on the topic of obesity prevention.

Proficient

Within two years of receiving the NDTR credential, Maria met a RDN who worked in an outpatient clinic specializing in obesity treatment at a local meeting. This was an area of practice she was developing a strong interest in. After shadowing the RDN for a day, Maria decided to make another attempt at completing a supervised practice experience that would allow her to become a RDN. She applied to several local internships and also to a graduate program that provided an integrated supervised practice option. Maria was accepted to the graduate program and was offered a teaching assistantship to help offset her tuition and fees. After completing the 24 month program, she successfully passed the RDN examination. Maria was offered a temporary position at the outpatient clinic as a general RDN to fill in for someone on maternity leave. Maria was eventually offered a full time position with the clinic; half-time sharing the position she had filled in for and half-time in the obesity treatment program. Within two years, Maria had transitioned over to a full-time position in obesity treatment. She became active in several DPGs, eventually serving as the newsletter editor for one.