

# Code of Ethics for the Profession

The **Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics** (Academy) and its credentialing agency, the **Commission on Dietetic Registration** (CDR), believe it is in the best interest of the profession and the public it serves to have a **Code of Ethics** in place that **provides guidance to dietetics practitioners in their professional practice and conduct**. Dietetics practitioners have voluntarily adopted this Code of Ethics to reflect the values and ethical principles guiding the dietetics profession and to set forth commitments and obligations of the dietetics practitioner to the public, clients, the profession, colleagues, and other professionals. The current Code of Ethics was approved on June 2, 2009, by the Academy Board of Directors, House of Delegates, and the Commission on Dietetic Registration.



## **THE CODE OF ETHICS APPLIES TO THE FOLLOWING PRACTITIONERS:**

- All members of the Academy who are credentialed (RDN or NDTR)
- All members of the Academy who are not credentialed
- All RDNs and NDTRs who are not members of the Academy.

The Code is overseen by a 3 person Ethics Committee, with representation from the Board of Directors, Commission on Dietetic Registration and House of Delegates. The term of office is 3 years.

# There are 19 principles of the code which are divided into 5 categories

## FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES

## RESPONSIBILITIES TO THE PUBLIC

## RESPONSIBILITIES TO CLIENTS

## RESPONSIBILITIES TO THE PROFESSION

## RESPONSIBILITIES TO COLLEAGUES AND OTHER PROFESSIONALS

### FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES

1. The dietetics practitioner conducts himself/herself with honesty, integrity, and fairness.
2. The dietetics practitioner supports and promotes high standards of professional practice. The dietetics practitioner accepts the obligation to protect clients, the public, and the profession by upholding the Code of Ethics for the Profession of Dietetics and by reporting perceived violations of the Code through the processes established by the Academy and its credentialing agency, the Commission on Dietetic Registration (CDR).

### RESPONSIBILITIES TO THE PUBLIC

3. The dietetics practitioner considers the health, safety, and welfare of the public at all times. The dietetics practitioner will report inappropriate behavior or treatment of a client by another dietetics practitioner or other professionals.
4. The dietetics practitioner complies with all laws and regulations applicable or related to the profession or to the practitioner's ethical obligations as described in this Code.
  - a. The dietetics practitioner must not be convicted of a crime under the laws of the United States, whether a felony or a misdemeanor, an essential element of which is dishonesty.
  - b. The dietetics practitioner must not be disciplined by a state for conduct that would violate one or more of these principles.
  - c. The dietetics practitioner must not commit an act of

misfeasance or malfeasance that is directly related to the practice of the profession as determined by a court of competent jurisdiction, a licensing board, or an agency of a governmental body.

5. The dietetics practitioner provides professional services with objectivity and with respect for the unique needs and values of individuals.
  - a. The dietetics practitioner does not, in professional practice, discriminate against others on the basis of race, ethnicity, creed, religion, disability, gender, age, gender identity, sexual orientation, national origin, economic status, or any other legally protected category.
  - b. The dietetics practitioner provides services in a manner that is sensitive to cultural differences.
  - c. The dietetics practitioner does not engage in sexual harassment in connection with professional practice.
6. The dietetics practitioner does not engage in false or misleading practices or communications.
  - a. The dietetics practitioner does not engage in false or deceptive advertising of his or her services.
  - b. The dietetics practitioner promotes or endorses specific goods or products only in a manner that is not false and misleading.
  - c. The dietetics practitioner provides accurate and truthful information in communicating with the public.
7. The dietetics practitioner withdraws from professional practice when unable to fulfill his or her professional duties and responsibilities to clients and others.

- a. The dietetics practitioner withdraws from practice when he/she has engaged in abuse of a substance such that it could affect his or her practice.
  - b. The dietetics practitioner ceases practice when he or she has been adjudged by a court to be mentally incompetent.
  - c. The dietetics practitioner will not engage in practice when he or she has a condition that substantially impairs his or her ability to provide effective service to others.
- 14. The dietetics practitioner assumes a life-long responsibility and accountability for personal competence in practice, consistent with accepted professional standards, continually striving to increase professional knowledge and skills and to apply them in practice.
  - 15. The dietetics practitioner is alert to the occurrence of a real or potential conflict of interest and takes appropriate action whenever a conflict arises.
    - a. The dietetics practitioner makes full disclosure of any real or perceived conflict of interest.
    - b. When a conflict of interest cannot be resolved by disclosure, the dietetics practitioner takes such other action as may be necessary to eliminate the conflict, including recusal from an office, position, or practice situation.

## **RESPONSIBILITIES TO CLIENTS**

- 8. The dietetics practitioner recognizes and exercises professional judgment within the limits of his or her qualifications and collaborates with others, seeks counsel, or makes referrals as appropriate.
- 9. The dietetics practitioner treats clients and patients with respect and consideration.
  - a. The dietetics practitioner provides sufficient information to enable clients and others to make their own informed decisions.
  - b. The dietetics practitioner respects the client's right to make decisions regarding the recommended plan of care, including consent, modification, or refusal.
- 10. The dietetics practitioner protects confidential information and makes full disclosure about any limitations on his or her ability to guarantee full confidentiality.
- 11. The dietetics practitioner, in dealing with and providing services to clients and others, complies with the same principles set forth in "Responsibilities to the Public" (Principles #3-7).
- 16. The dietetics practitioner permits the use of his or her name for the purpose of certifying that dietetics services have been rendered only if he or she has provided or supervised the provision of those services.
- 17. The dietetics practitioner accurately presents professional qualifications and credentials.
  - a. The dietetics practitioner, in seeking, maintaining, and using credentials provided by CDR, provides accurate information and complies with all requirements imposed by CDR. The dietetics practitioner uses CDR-awarded credentials ("RD" or "Registered Dietitian"; "DTR" or "Dietetic Technician, Registered"; "CS" or "Certified Specialist"; and "FAND" or "Fellow of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics") only when the credential is current and authorized by CDR.
  - b. The dietetics practitioner does not aid any other person in violating any CDR requirements, or in representing himself or herself as CDR-credentialed when he or she is not.

## **RESPONSIBILITIES TO THE PROFESSION**

- 12. The dietetics practitioner practices dietetics based on evidence-based principles and current information.
- 13. The dietetics practitioner presents reliable and substantiated information and interprets controversial information without personal bias, recognizing that legitimate differences of opinion exist.
- 18. The dietetics practitioner does not invite, accept, or offer gifts, monetary incentives, or other considerations that affect or reasonably give an appearance of affecting his/her professional judgment.
 

*Clarification of Principle:*

  - a. Whether a gift, incentive, or other item of consideration shall be viewed to affect, or give the appearance

of affecting, a dietetics practitioner's professional judgment is dependent on all factors relating to the transaction, including the amount or value of the consideration, the likelihood that the practitioner's judgment will or is intended to be affected, the position held by the practitioner, and whether the consideration is offered or generally available to persons other than the practitioner.

- b. It shall not be a violation of this principle for a dietetics practitioner to accept compensation as a consultant or employee or as part of a research grant or corporate sponsorship program, provided the relationship is openly disclosed and the practitioner acts with integrity in performing the services or responsibilities.
- c. This principle shall not preclude a dietetics practitioner from accepting gifts of nominal value, attendance at educational programs, meals in connection with educational exchanges of information, free samples of products, or similar items, as long as such items are not offered in exchange for or with the expectation of, and do not result in, conduct or services that are contrary to the practitioner's professional judgment.

d. The test for appearance of impropriety is whether the conduct would create in reasonable minds a perception that the dietetics practitioner's ability to carry out professional responsibilities with integrity, impartiality, and competence is impaired.

## RESPONSIBILITIES TO COLLEAGUES AND OTHER PROFESSIONALS

- 19. The dietetics practitioner demonstrates respect for the values, rights, knowledge, and skills of colleagues and other professionals.
  - a. The dietetics practitioner does not engage in dishonest, misleading, or inappropriate business practices that demonstrate a disregard for the rights or interests of others.
  - b. The dietetics practitioner provides objective evaluations of performance for employees and coworkers, candidates for employment, students, professional association memberships, awards, or scholarships, making all reasonable efforts to avoid bias in the professional evaluation of others.

## How Do I Know if it is Really an Ethics Issue?

In the Ethics Committee's experience, many of the matters brought to them are not ethics matters. Instead, the matters presented are business disputes, employment disputes, or legal matters. What is...



### AN ETHICAL ISSUE?

The violation of established rules or standards governing the conduct of a person or the members of a profession. An ethical issue is specific to one of the 19 principles of the Code.



### A LEGAL ISSUE?

Many state and federal laws apply to our profession. If a state or federal law has been violated, the issue could result in action by the Ethics Committee. However, not every violation of the law is a breach of the Academy/CDR Code of Ethics for the Profession of Dietetics.



### A BUSINESS ISSUE?

An issue may be a business issue, but not an ethical issue, if it arises from a business dispute or breach of a contractual obligation, or a failure to provide products or services of an expected quality. Examples include bill-ing or contract disputes, scheduling problems or other dissatisfaction with services provided. You should not attempt to use the Code to resolve business disputes between practitioners, other health care providers or consumers.



### AN EMPLOYMENT ISSUE?

Employment issues can be addressed by an employer's policy or policies or can be resolved in the workplace via the appropriate structure to provide oversight (i.e., Human Resources) or through federal and state laws that protect employees. An employment issue may not be an ethical issue, such as a disagreement with a supervisor or other employee about how to conduct business. Additional examples of an employment issue include: disagreement about time or hours worked; misleading statements to supervisors, coworkers, customers, or vendors; and misusing an employer's assets.

# Approach to Ethical Decision-making\*

## STEP 1

### STATE AN ETHICAL DILEMMA

Identify components of potential ethical dilemma

- Is it an ethical issue, OR a
- Communication problem, OR a
- Practitioner-patient issue, OR a
- Practitioner-supervisor/employer issue, OR a
- Legal matter
- What are the facts of the situation?
- Objectively identify the issue
- Who are key participants
- Identify your perceptions/values
- What further information is needed

## STEP 2

### CONNECT ETHICAL THEORY TO THE DILEMMA IN PRACTICE

Employ four key principles of ethical theory\*

- Autonomy
- Nonmaleficence
- Beneficence
- Justice

## STEP 3

### APPLY THE ACADEMY CODE OF ETHICS TO THE ISSUE AND YOUR ETHICAL DECISION-MAKING

There are 19 principles of the current Academy Code of Ethics. Two are fundamental principles:

- Honesty, integrity, and fairness; and
- Behaviors that support and promote high professional standards.

## STEP 4

### SELECT THE BEST ALTERNATIVE AND JUSTIFY YOUR DECISION

Identify possible alternatives to resolve the dilemma, considering:

- Cultural influences affecting your decision making process
- How alternative solutions track with your values and your institution's values
- Your confidence in and ability to defend the ultimate decision?
- Whether the decision aligns with the Academy Code of Ethics and/or the SOPs/SOPPs
- How the decision might affect others and whether they will support it
- Make a final decision

## STEP 5

### DEVELOP STRATEGIES TO SUCCESSFULLY IMPLEMENT THE CHOSEN DECISION

Strategies to successfully implement the chosen resolution

- Seek additional knowledge to clarify or contextualize the situation as needed
- Implement chosen resolution

## STEP 6

### EVALUATE THE OUTCOMES AND HOW TO PREVENT A SIMILAR OCCURRENCE

- Monitor outcomes, ensuring intended outcome(s) are achieved
- What are the strategies to prevent a similar issue in the future?

## INDIVIDUAL -VS- ORGANIZATIONAL ETHICS

### What if my ethics complaint concerns an organization or group, not an individual?

The Code of Ethics for the Dietetics Profession pertains to individual practitioners, not organizations. The Academy is an individual professional membership organization. Thus, the Academy cannot accept ethics complaints that pertain to organizations. If you have an organizational ethics issue:

- If your concern involves a for-profit or non-profit organization, reach out to the governing body or Board of Directors
- If your concern relates to a hospital or healthcare system, consider contacting the American Hospital Association (AHA)
- If your complaint involves a health insurer, the America's Health Insurance Plans (AHIP) may be able to assist
- If your concern relates to a non-dietetics professional that is not an Academy member, consider contacting the professional organization that represents that profession

The focus of the code is:



EDUCATION



REMEDICATION



SELF-REGULATION

The purpose of the code is not policing practitioners.