



Revisions to the Code of Ethics for the Nutrition and Dietetics Profession



Tony Peregrin

PROFESSIONAL CODES OF ethics are modified and adapted as society and professions evolve in order to address the new ethical concerns that arise in daily practice. The Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics (Academy)/Commission on Dietetic Registration (CDR) Code of Ethics has developed over time as health care becomes more complex, and as the variety of settings in which nutrition and dietetics practitioners work becomes more multifaceted and challenging.

Recognizing the need for a review and revision of the 2009 Academy/CDR

Code of Ethics, an eight-member Code of Ethics Task Force was formed in late 2016. A primary aim of this task force was to ensure that the updated code provides sufficient guidance for the expanded roles and responsibilities of the nutrition and dietetics practitioner. To accomplish this goal, the task force received input from a legal counsel, reviewed the codes of 11 professional associations, and solicited feedback from more than 100,000 credentialed nutrition and dietetics practitioners.

A code of ethics, for any professional organization, empowers practitioners to think and act in a manner that upholds the fundamental ideals of the organization and is intended to protect and benefit the practitioner and the patient/client—and this is especially true for the Academy. In fact, the Academy/CDR Code of Ethics is so essential to the work of nutrition and dietetics practitioners that it is ranked seventh in importance according to the 2016 Needs Satisfaction Survey, which measured member value satisfaction of 59 Academy programs, products, and services.¹

The newly updated Academy/CDR Code of Ethics is effective June 1, 2018, and is responsive to trends related to digital health care, social media, the evolving use of other technologies, and other topic areas relevant to contemporary nutrition and dietetics practice.

This article describes the revision process for the 2018 Code of Ethics. The Code of Ethics is also reproduced in full.

HISTORY OF THE ETHICS CODES AND THE ACADEMY

The Academy began recognizing the importance of establishing professional codes almost 90 years ago, when it developed and distributed “A Professional Code for the Hospital Dietitian” in 1930. Subsequent standards-related documents were created, including the “Guidelines for Professional

Conduct” in 1971 and “The Dietitian’s Oath” in 1977.

The Academy developed its first formal Code of Ethics in 1982, and it has been revised several times to meet the emerging ethical challenges faced by the profession. The revisions occurred in 1987, 1998, 2009, and most recently in 2018.

The 2018 version, which includes a preamble, four principles, and 32 standards, was approved by the Academy and CDR Boards in February 2018. The new updated code is applicable to all Academy members (credentialed and non-credentialed) and all CDR-credentialed practitioners.

Academy/CDR Code of Ethics Task Force

The Task Force was composed of three current Ethics Committee members and five Academy members appointed by the President. Academy/CDR ethics legal counsel participated in all meetings and conference calls to provide guidance as appropriate.

Beginning in November 2016, the Task Force—through a combination of conference calls and two face-to-face meetings—reviewed the 2009 Code of Ethics, comprising 19 principles and accompanying clarification statements, to determine whether they should be revised, including an analysis of length and specificity. The Task Force also evaluated the 2009 code to determine whether it met the following criteria:

- Provides sufficient guidance for the expanded roles and responsibilities of the nutrition and dietetics practitioner.
- Addresses the complexities encountered in the contemporary health care environment.
- Articulates a moral self-understanding of what is required of the nutrition and dietetics practitioner.

2212-2672/Copyright © 2018 by the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jand.2018.05.028>
 Available online 14 July 2016

The revised Academy/CDR Code of Ethics is available online at: www.eatrightpro.org/resources/practice/code-of-ethics/what-is-the-code-of-ethics, and educational resources are available to further explain the latest revision to the Code on the Academy’s website at: www.eatrightpro.org/resources/practice/code-of-ethics/ethics-education-resources.

The [Continuing Professional Education \(CPE\) quiz](#) for this article is available for free to Academy members through the MyCDRGo app (available for iOS and Android devices) and through www.jandonline.org (click on “CPE” in the menu and then “Academy Journal CPE Articles”). Log in with your Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics or Commission on Dietetic Registration username and password, click “Journal Article Quiz” on the next page, then click the “Additional Journal CPE quizzes” button to view a list of available quizzes. Non-members may take CPE quizzes by sending a request to journal@eatright.org. There is a fee of \$45 per quiz (includes quiz and copy of article) for non-member Journal CPE. CPE quizzes are valid for 1 year after the issue date in which the articles are published.

ACADEMY/CDR CODE OF ETHICS TASK FORCE

Lisa Dierks, MFCS, RDN, LD, *Chair*
Catherine Christie, PhD, RDN,
LD/N, FAND

Susan Laramée, MS, RDN,
FADA, FAND

Mindy Nelkin, DBE, RD

Mary Russell, MS, RDN, LDN,
FAND

Kevin Sauer, PhD, RDN, LD

Ellen Rosa Shanley, MBA, RD,
CDN, FAND

Jody Vogelzang, PhD, MAT,
MHS, RDN, LD, CHES, FADA,
FAND

Denise Lazar, Legal Counsel

- Includes the process of ethical decision making using the Principlist approach.
- Addresses appropriate ethical decision making as it relates to the areas of confidentiality, romantic and sexual interactions, preservation and protection of personal health information, end-of-life care for terminally ill patients/clients, cultural sensitivity, bullying, product sales, technology, and social media.

After a review of 11 benchmarking codes of ethics, the cumulative efforts of the Task Force resulted in a draft of the Academy/CDR Code of Ethics for the Nutrition and Dietetics Profession in May 2017.

The Academy and CDR boards approved the draft Code of Ethics for the Nutrition and Dietetics Profession, as presented by the Code of Ethics Task Force, on July 19 and 22, 2017, respectively.

CODE OF ETHICS SURVEY

In an effort to observe industry best practices for the development of codes of ethics, the draft Code was distributed to more than 100,000 credentialed nutrition and dietetics practitioners and Academy members for comment. The aim of the survey was to solicit input to determine whether the revised draft Code was reflective of practice-related ethical challenges and of societal and

CODE OF ETHICS FOR THE NUTRITION AND DIETETICS PROFESSION

Effective Date: June 1, 2018

Preamble:

When providing services the nutrition and dietetics practitioner adheres to the core values of customer focus, integrity, innovation, social responsibility, and diversity. Science-based decisions, derived from the best available research and evidence, are the underpinnings of ethical conduct and practice.

This Code applies to nutrition and dietetics practitioners who act in a wide variety of capacities, and provides general principles and specific ethical standards for situations frequently encountered in daily practice. The primary goal is the protection of the individuals, groups, organizations, communities, or populations with whom the practitioner works and interacts.

The nutrition and dietetics practitioner supports and promotes high standards of professional practice, accepting the obligation to protect clients, the public and the profession; upholds the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics (Academy) and its credentialing agency the Commission on Dietetic Registration (CDR) Code of Ethics for the Nutrition and Dietetics Profession; and shall report perceived violations of the Code through established processes.

The Academy/CDR Code of Ethics for the Nutrition and Dietetics Profession establishes the principles and ethical standards that underlie the nutrition and dietetics practitioner's roles and conduct. All individuals to whom the Code applies are referred to as "nutrition and dietetics practitioners". By accepting membership in the Academy and/or accepting and maintaining CDR credentials, all nutrition and dietetics practitioners agree to abide by the Code.

Principles and Standards:

1. Competence and professional development in practice (Non-maleficence)

Nutrition and dietetics practitioners shall:

- Practice using an evidence-based approach within areas of competence, continuously develop and enhance expertise, and recognize limitations.
- Demonstrate in depth scientific knowledge of food, human nutrition and behavior.
- Assess the validity and applicability of scientific evidence without personal bias.
- Interpret, apply, participate in and/or generate research to enhance practice, innovation, and discovery.
- Make evidence-based practice decisions, taking into account the unique values and circumstances of the patient/client and community, in combination with the practitioner's expertise and judgment.
- Recognize and exercise professional judgment within the limits of individual qualifications and collaborate with others, seek counsel, and make referrals as appropriate.
- Act in a caring and respectful manner, mindful of individual differences, cultural, and ethnic diversity.
- Practice within the limits of their scope and collaborate with the inter-professional team.

2. Integrity in personal and organizational behaviors and practices (Autonomy)

Nutrition and dietetics practitioners shall:

- Disclose any conflicts of interest, including any financial interests in products or services that are recommended. Refrain from accepting gifts

(continued)

or services which potentially influence or which may give the appearance of influencing professional judgment.

- b. Comply with all applicable laws and regulations, including obtaining/maintaining a state license or certification if engaged in practice governed by nutrition and dietetics statutes.
- c. Maintain and appropriately use credentials.
- d. Respect intellectual property rights, including citation and recognition of the ideas and work of others, regardless of the medium (eg, written, oral, electronic).
- e. Provide accurate and truthful information in all communications.
- f. Report inappropriate behavior or treatment of a patient/client by another nutrition and dietetics practitioner or other professionals.
- g. Document, code and bill to most accurately reflect the character and extent of delivered services.
- h. Respect patient/client's autonomy. Safeguard patient/client confidentiality according to current regulations and laws.
- i. Implement appropriate measures to protect personal health information using appropriate techniques (eg, encryption).

3. Professionalism (Beneficence)

Nutrition and dietetics practitioners shall:

- a. Participate in and contribute to decisions that affect the well-being of patients/clients.
- b. Respect the values, rights, knowledge, and skills of colleagues and other professionals.
- c. Demonstrate respect, constructive dialogue, civility and professionalism in all communications, including social media.
- d. Refrain from communicating false, fraudulent, deceptive, misleading, disparaging or unfair statements or claims.
- e. Uphold professional boundaries and refrain from romantic relationships with any patients/clients, surrogates, supervisees, or students.
- f. Refrain from verbal/physical/emotional/sexual harassment.
- g. Provide objective evaluations of performance for employees, coworkers, and students and candidates for employment, professional association memberships, awards, or scholarships, making all reasonable efforts to avoid bias in the professional evaluation of others.
- h. Communicate at an appropriate level to promote health literacy.
- i. Contribute to the advancement and competence of others, including colleagues, students, and the public.

4. Social responsibility for local, regional, national, global nutrition and well-being (Justice)

Nutrition and dietetics practitioners shall:

- a. Collaborate with others to reduce health disparities and protect human rights.
- b. Promote fairness and objectivity with fair and equitable treatment.
- c. Contribute time and expertise to activities that promote respect, integrity, and competence of the profession.
- d. Promote the unique role of nutrition and dietetics practitioners.
- e. Engage in service that benefits the community and to enhance the public's trust in the profession.
- f. Seek leadership opportunities in professional, community, and service organizations to enhance health and nutritional status while protecting the public.

Glossary of Terms:

Autonomy: ensures a patient, client, or professional has the capacity and self-determination to engage in individual decision-making specific to personal health or practice.³

Beneficence: encompasses taking positive steps to benefit others, which includes balancing benefit and risk.³

(continued)

professional norms. Survey respondents noted significant agreement with the draft Code (85.0% to 93.2%), confirming the revised principles and standards are reflective of the ethical challenges of their practice and provides sufficient ethical guidance. The survey responses, plus several individual- and committee-suggested revisions, revealed key topic areas that respondents felt should be specifically addressed in the revised code, including social media, supplement sales, protection of personal health information, duty to report ethics violations, and state licensure.

The Task Force addressed the submitted suggestions in a revised draft Code of Ethics, submitted to the CDR and Academy boards in early 2018. The CDR and Academy Boards approved the final Code of Ethics for the Nutrition and Dietetics Profession during their February 4-5, 2018 and February 22-23, 2018 meetings, respectively.

The final code is composed of four anchor principles, with 32 accompanying ethical standards. The final version accomplished the Task Force's goal of developing a readable, concise but comprehensive code that responds to the current challenges of nutrition and dietetics practice.

APPLICABILITY

It is important to note that the Code of Ethics for the Nutrition and Dietetics Profession sets forth the values, principles, and standards that guide the profession as a whole. With this in mind, The Academy/CDR Code of Ethics applies to the following individuals:

- all members of the Academy who are credentialed by CDR;
- all members of the Academy who are not credentialed by CDR; and
- all CDR-credentialed practitioners, whether or not they are members of the Academy.

HIGHLY VALUED MEMBER BENEFIT

As it has approximately every 4 years since 1999-2000, the Academy, in conjunction with the CDR, undertook a comprehensive assessment of the needs of those involved in nutrition/dietetics in 2016. Results showed that the Code of Ethics is a top-tier member benefit, scoring seventh out of 59 total

Competence: a principle of professional practice, identifying the ability of the provider to administer safe and reliable services on a consistent basis.⁴

Conflict(s) of Interest(s): defined as a personal or financial interest or a duty to another party which may prevent a person from acting in the best interests of the intended beneficiary, including simultaneous membership on boards with potentially conflicting interests related to the profession, members or the public.⁴

Customer: any client, patient, resident, participant, student, consumer, individual/person, group, population, or organization to which the nutrition and dietetics practitioner provides service.⁵

Diversity: “The Academy values and respects the diverse viewpoints and individual differences of all people. The Academy’s mission and vision are most effectively realized through the promotion of a diverse membership that reflects cultural, ethnic, gender, racial, religious, sexual orientation, socioeconomic, geographical, political, educational, experiential and philosophical characteristics of the public it services. The Academy actively identifies and offers opportunities to individuals with varied skills, talents, abilities, ideas, disabilities, backgrounds and practice expertise.”⁶

Evidence-based Practice: Evidence-based practice is an approach to health care wherein health practitioners use the best evidence possible, ie, the most appropriate information available, to make decisions for individuals, groups and populations. Evidence-based practice values, enhances and builds on clinical expertise, knowledge of disease mechanisms, and pathophysiology. It involves complex and conscientious decision-making based not only on the available evidence but also on client characteristics, situations, and preferences. It recognizes that health care is individualized and ever changing and involves uncertainties and probabilities. Evidence-based practice incorporates successful strategies that improve client outcomes and are derived from various sources of evidence including research, national guidelines, policies, consensus statements, systematic analysis of clinical experience, quality improvement data, specialized knowledge and skills of experts.⁴

Justice (social justice): supports fair, equitable, and appropriate treatment for individuals¹ and fair allocation of resources.

Non-Maleficence: is the intent to not inflict harm.³

member benefits.¹ These findings are aligned with other professional organizations in which codes administer value to members by providing guidance for conduct in daily practice and,

in fact, have been determined to be the most important benefit to many members, according to a survey of 1,025 US association members conducted in 2017.²

The process of revising the Code of Ethics for the Nutrition and Dietetics Profession was a coordinated effort led by the Code of Ethics Task Force with the goal of developing a set of guiding principles relevant to the ethical concerns of today’s nutrition and dietetics practitioners. What remains unchanged with this revision is a commitment to the Academy’s core values of customer focus, integrity, innovation, social responsibility, and diversity and a dedication to evidence-based research and practice.

References

1. Rogers D. Report on the Academy/Commission on Dietetic Registration 2016 Needs Satisfaction Survey. *J Acad Nutr Diet.* 2017;117(4):626-631.
2. Gaertner D, Myers A, Smith P. Member Loyalty Study: A Deep Dive into Member Retention and Preferences. <https://www.yourmembership.com/resource-library/whitpapers/community-brands-member-loyalty-study/>. Published 2017. Accessed April 2, 2018.
3. Fornari A. Approaches to ethical decision-making. *J Acad Nutr Diet.* 2015;115(1):119-121.
4. Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics Definition of Terms List. June 2017 (Approved by Definition of Terms Workgroup Quality Management Committee May 16, 2017). http://www.eatrightpro.org/~/_media/eatrightpro%20files/practice/scope%20standards%20of%20practice/academydefinitionoftermslist.ashx. Accessed October 11, 2017.
5. Academy Quality Management Committee. Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics: Revised 2017 Standards of Practice in Nutrition Care and Standards of Professional Performance for Registered Dietitian Nutritionists. *J Acad Nutr Diet.* 2018;118(1):132-140.
6. Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics. Diversity Philosophy Statement. (Adopted by the House of Delegates and Board of Directors in 1995.)

AUTHOR INFORMATION

T. Peregrin is an editor and writer for a Chicago-based medical association and a freelance writer, Chicago, IL.

STATEMENT OF POTENTIAL CONFLICT OF INTEREST

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

FUNDING/SUPPORT

There is no funding to disclose.