

The Academy in Action: Leading the Future of Food as Medicine

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The Nutrition Science Forum is the Academy's way of bringing together leaders from a variety of sectors to talk about a particular topic. And so this year it's Food is Medicine.

And we have leaders from the agriculture world, academia, healthcare, policy, the community. Many of us work in one area, and research doesn't necessarily get shared from sector to sector. And so the opportunity here is to have everybody in one room hearing the same messages and fostering collaboration to perhaps see where there may be gaps that can be filled by those collaborations that hopefully will form in this meeting.

The foundation has been involved in Food as Medicine for a number of years. We know that diet makes a major difference in what happens to people in terms of their health and well-being over time. And so the foundation has supported all of the efforts that are available to make things better for the population and the dietitians that are working with those populations.

The Academy's definition of food as medicine is really a philosophy in where we bring together access to healthy food with nutrition education or medical nutrition therapy.

What we felt was lacking was positioning of the registered dietitian nutritionist. And the RDN is really essential to all Food is Medicine programming no matter what setting it's taking place in or what iteration it is.

Events like this are critical to bring these different groups together that won't necessarily be talking to each other. The best research that gets done, the best ways we move initiatives forward is to make it cross-cutting in every way that we can. In order to make this a truly systematic effort that's cohesive and aligned in purpose, we need all angles.

Diversity of opinion matters. And it's one of the things the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics does really well at, bringing people with different backgrounds and different opinions to the table.

One of the joys of being at conferences such like this is the, is, is the close interactions that we have with, with the dietitian community. In this ecosystem of Food is Medicine, there is the importance of doing the rigorous scientific research, but there's also the importance of translating that information to what really matters, and that's our end user, uh, whether it be kiddos, whether it be families, whether it be communities.

Relating to food as medicine and RDNs, I mean, they are the frontline. As researchers, we can publish something in a peer-reviewed journal, but if it dies in a journal, it really doesn't help anyone.

What I want to underscore, and I do every chance I get, is the importance of the dietitian community. They are the professionals who have spent the years training and taking complex scientific information and making it actionable and understandable.

RDNs are the best prepared clinicians to address patients' nutritional deficiencies, to optimize their overall nutrition, and to identify where nutrition interventions can lead to better outcomes within their particular health conditions. And so RDNs working closely within a multidisciplinary care team, is really essential in making sure that we're not missing patients who would benefit from what are overall very low-cost interventions.

RDNs were the originators of food as medicine. We're the only professionals who have the ability to translate complex science into practical food-based solutions. And we know that when RDN services and guidance and medical nutrition therapy is combined with food-based benefits, that health outcomes are improved.