

Dietitians do much more than you think

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The careers of dietitians are way more diverse than many think. The typical assumption is that a dietitian is a nutritional health professional available through private practice to those who need and can afford weight loss expertise. The reality couldn't be more different. Dietitians are employed across private practice and public healthcare; academia and research; corporate, government and non-government sectors. While they all have the expertise to deal with weight loss and weight management, which can be critical health issues, their expertise in science-based nutrition means that they work far more widely on a myriad of nutrition-related issues.

Our relationships with food are so complex that it is not uncommon for a community-based dietitian to be dealing with both issues of obesity and malnutrition not just in the same day, but even within the same family. If you are in hospital recovering from cancer surgery or a debilitating stroke; how do you take in the nutrition you need? If you are a consumer goods company wanting to offer healthier food products; who will you turn to? If we want to understand the latest claims about Omega 3 fats; who will help us sort the fact from fiction? If a school needs to revamp its tuck shop and find healthier, popular alternatives; what are the best, proven recommendations?

In support of Dietitian's Week, which runs from the 3rd to the 7th of June, [ADSA, the Association for Dietetics in South Africa](#), is highlighting the wide range of services dietitians are specifically trained to deliver. SASPEN, the South African Society for Parenteral and Enteral Nutrition; ENASA, the Enteral Nutrition Association of South Africa and HDIG, the Hospital Dietitian Interest Group have all joined forces with ADSA to raise awareness that there's much more to the work of a dietitian than is commonly assumed.

Registered Dietitian and ADSA spokesperson Abby Courtenay says, "At the core of every dietitian's work is evidenced-based nutrition science and the ability to interpret this to meet an endless variety of demands for sound and expert nutrition advice. Worldwide, nutrition research is ongoing, and Registered Dietitians are required by regulatory bodies to keep studying after they have qualified in order to ensure that they are at the forefront of the latest nutrition science, no matter what field or industry they work in."

SASPEN spokesperson, Logesh Govender, further explains: "In South Africa, dietitians must be registered with the HPCSA which regulates the professional titles of Dietitians, Supplementary Dietitians, and Student Dietitians, as well as Nutritionists, Supplementary Nutritionists, and Student nutritionists. Requirements for eligibility for registration include a recognized bachelor's degree in dietetics or nutrition from an accredited educational institution. The undergraduate training should include the three practice areas of therapeutic nutrition, community nutrition, and food service management. Dietitians can then select any of these areas to practice. Even in these different areas there are dietitians who may develop a keen interest in specific components."

These are some of things that Registered Dietitians do:

Christine Taljaard-Krugel: "As a Registered Dietitian researcher and consultant, I make nutrition evidence useful for different sectors, including government, the private sector and the public. I also invest in developing leadership capabilities in nutrition professionals across the continent to move the nutrition agenda forward."

Linda Drummond: "My role at the Consumer Goods Council of South Africa (CGCSA) is to be the Nutrition Consultant to the Food Safety Initiative (FSI). The CGCSA is a non-profit organization representing more than 12000 member companies engaged in the manufacture, retail, wholesale and distribution of consumer goods in South Africa and internationally. The FSI advocates for sustainable initiatives, forums, projects and programmes related to food safety, nutrition, quality and sustainability. My work focuses on helping members achieve compliance to food and nutrition regulations and I am

responsible for driving the Healthy Food Options Industry Initiatives programme. The work in this programme aims to make healthier food options available and accessible to South Africans, as a means of curbing non-communicable diseases and promoting good health.”

Nazeeia Sayed: “I am a Consultant Registered Dietitian. I have over 20 years’ experience spanning food composition, research, lecturing dietetic students, supporting food industry research and development, regulatory and marketing teams in product development (in particular salt reduction, healthy recipe development and fortification), and developing nutrition communication.”

Bianca Tromp: “As a Registered Dietitian at the Heart and Stroke Foundation South Africa (HSFSA) which is a non-governmental and non-profit organisation, I am responsible for creating public awareness of cardiovascular disease and stroke in order to reduce the prevalence in South Africa. With this aim in mind, I provide scientifically accurate information to healthcare professionals and the general public in the form of research updates newsletters, television, radio and written media. The Nutrition Science team at the HSFSA also play a fundamental role in the Heart Mark endorsement programme where we endorse products that meet our strict nutritional criteria.”

Gaby Sidelsky: “I am a private hospital Clinical Registered Dietitian which means I work in a hospital. On a daily basis I work with doctors, mainly surgeons, who perform procedures on patients who require nutritional counselling on discharge. This is usually a gut surgery which requires a long term change in diet. I also work in ICU where I calculate a patients nutritional requirements and provide nutritional support if they cannot eat orally such as feeding through a tube from the nose directly into the stomach or through a vein. I also provide extra nutrients for patients who can't get enough through their food or have a poor appetite due to side effects of medication, such as cancer patients on chemotherapy.”

Qudsiyah Kassim: “As a public service Clinical Registered Dietitian I play a role in the public sector by providing therapeutic nutrition to both in and outpatients. I am part of the hospital's multidisciplinary team and engage in ward rounds in my allocated wards. I provide therapeutic nutrition through assessing patients and prescribing the appropriate nutrition intervention as per the patient's medical condition, as well as delivering nutrition intervention for in-patients through the prescription of a hospital diet/enteral nutrition/parenteral nutrition/dietary education and providing a meal plan on discharge. For outpatients, I conduct a nutrition assessment and provide relevant dietary education (with appropriate meal plan and/ or supplementation if needed).”

Cindy van Rooyen: “As a Registered Dietitian I am also qualified to work in the food service industry. I currently work at a school hostel as their food service manager. In this role, I am responsible for menu planning, which includes making sure that the meals are nutritionally appropriate for our students (13-18 years). I am responsible for doing stock take and stock control to ensure the products are fresh, nutritious and safe to consume. I also have to ensure that we comply with the health and safety act and that the appropriate hygiene practices are followed.”

What Dietitians Do

Your first thought might be weight loss, and you would be right, but that's not all. Obesity is only one of a great many nutrition-related conditions that dietitians can treat. Nutrition is one of the cornerstones of good health for all and being nutrition experts allows dietitians (who are qualified healthcare professionals) to work in many different fields to assess, diagnose and treat dietary and nutritional problems using evidence-based recommendations.



Private Practicing Dietitians

Consult with clients that need advice on nutrition therapy to manage various chronic illnesses & disease.



Clinical Dietitians

Work in a hospital setting (public or private) consulting in- and outpatients, assessing and individualising medical nutrition therapy as an integral part of the patient care team.



Foodservice Management Dietitians

Manage the provision of healthy and specialised diets to persons in institutions.



Community Dietitians

Work in the public sector and for non-governmental, community-based and non-profit organisations.



Consulting Dietitians

Consult to food, nutrition, healthcare and pharmaceutical industries.



Research/Academic Dietitians

Conducting research studies in various nutrition-related topics. Research conducted in the field of nutrition is important as it provides various stakeholders with evidence that can inform current practices.

It's all about nutrition! To find a qualified and registered dietitian, visit www.adsa.org.za and click on 'Find a Dietitian'.



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Association for Dietetics in South Africa



The Association for Dietetics in South Africa (ADSA) is the professional organisation for Registered Dietitians. The primary aims of the Association are to serve the interests of dietitian in South Africa and promote the nutritional well being of the community.

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