

Written Testimony Submitted by Elizabeth Ruder
House Democratic Policy Committee Public Hearing
April 9, 2012

Since I am unable to testify in person, I am submitting my written testimony to be entered into the hearing's record.

My name is Elizabeth Ruder. I am a doctoral level Registered Dietitian and Assistant Professor at the University of Pittsburgh. In this position, I serve as Director of the Didactic Program in Dietetics to educate and train the next generation of RDs. I am here today to ask that you advance legislation that would recognize Registered Dietitians as providers in all health insurance plans in our state. The objective of my testimony is to provide you with an idea of the education and training required of Registered Dietitians.

Earning the RD credential is not easy, but the rigor and oversight of the credentialing process underscores that Registered Dietitians, alone, possess the standardized education, clinical training, continuing education and national credentialing requirements necessary to be recognized as providers of MNT (medical nutrition therapy) services.

The first step to become an RD is to earn a minimum of a bachelor's degree with approximately 60 credits of course work specific to nutrition and dietetics, including nutrition assessment, nutrient metabolism, medical nutrition therapy, and nutrition education and counseling, from an institution accredited by the Accreditation Council for Education in Nutrition and Dietetics (ACEND). There are eleven accredited programs in Pennsylvania and roughly 226 accredited programs in the United States.

After completing the educational requirements from an accredited program, students must fulfill a minimum of 1200 hours of supervised practice through an accredited program at a health-care facility, community agency, or a foodservice corporation to obtain hands on experience with the supervision of a precepting Registered Dietitian. Typically, a practice program will run 10 to 12 months in length; most pay no stipend and many actually charge tuition. Despite this obstacle, competition for supervised practice programs is intense—nationally there are 2 applicants for every one position available in an internship practice program. Thus, rising Registered Dietitians generally possess excellent grades and significant work or volunteer experience in nutrition.

Once the 1200 hours of supervised practice experience is complete, the individual is eligible to sit for a national examination administered by the Commission on Dietetic Registration that ultimately awards the credential of "RD". Moreover, to maintain one's RD credential, one must accumulate 75 hours of continuing education every 5 years.

As I have alluded to, the somewhat lengthy, competitive process required to become an RD is overseen by two separate, independent agencies: the Accreditation Council for Education in Nutrition and Dietetics and the Commission on Dietetic Registration. These agencies ensure that individuals who possess the RD credential have received a standardized education, hands on clinical training and remain up to date with the advances in the field.

However, possession of the RD credential following a bachelor's degree is just the minimum amount of education required to practice. Some RDs hold additional certifications in specialized areas of practice, awarded by the Commission on Dietetic Registration, in areas of specialization such as pediatric or renal nutrition, sports dietetics, nutrition support and diabetes education. In addition, of the 3,964 Registered Dietitians in Pennsylvania, 33% have a Master's degree or higher.

Registered Dietitians are highly trained to practice MNT and data demonstrate that RD-provided nutrition counseling saves money. Results from a 12-month randomized controlled trial comparing a registered dietitian–led lifestyle case-management intervention cost an average of \$328 per person per year, but reduced mean health plan costs by an average of \$3,586 per year (1).

Once again, I ask that you work on legislation that would recognize Registered Dietitians as providers in all health insurance plans in our state. Our citizens deserve consistent access to qualified, trained, licensed healthcare professionals.

1. Wolf AM, Siadaty M, Yaeger B, et al. Effects of lifestyle intervention on health care costs: Improving Control with Activity and Nutrition (ICAN). *Journal of the American Dietetic Association*. Aug 2007;107(8):1365-1373.