



Position Paper on the Role of the Dietitian in the Management of Obesity

Dietitians play a key role in the management of obesity in adults and children at every level. They are uniquely qualified to translate the scientific evidence on energy intake and expenditure, nutrition and behaviour into practical dietary advice and the provision of healthy food. Dietitians use counselling techniques to support individuals and groups who are overweight or obese or have obesity related conditions, such as diabetes and coronary heart disease, in an effective way both short term and long term (Lichtenstein 2007, Zazpe 2008, Govers 2009, Delahanty 2010).

Definition of obesity

Obesity is a complex chronic condition that is characterised by the excess accumulation of body fat to an extent that health is adversely affected (World Health Organisation 2000). Lifelong commitment to treatment and management by both the individual and the health care system is required.

Role of the dietitian

Dietitians are in a key position to promote a healthy lifestyle. They are educated in nutrition, health, counselling and behavioural strategies and are actively involved in public health, health promotion/prevention, clinical treatment, disease management, research, food planning and preparation. Dietitians have the skills and competences to interpret and communicate theoretical knowledge to enable individuals to make appropriate choices about food and healthy lifestyle and to teach people how to sustain healthy behaviour.

Dietitians fulfil their role in prevention, treatment, food provision and research in a range of different settings:

- Healthcare – primary care, acute, residential and private practice
- Education – pre-school, school and higher education institutions
- Workplace
- Food industry
- Multi-media
- EU, national and local governments (EFAD 2008)

EFAD shares the concerns expressed by the WHO and other international bodies regarding the increasing prevalence of obesity across the globe and supports calls to implement effective strategies to prevent and treat obesity and its comorbidities

References

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About The European Federation of the Associations of Dietitians (EFAD)

EFAD was established in 1978 with aims to:

- Promote the development of the dietetic profession
- Develop dietetics on a scientific and professional level in the common interest of the member associations
- Facilitate communication between national dietetic associations and other organisations – professional, educational, and governmental
- Encourage a better nutrition situation for the population of the member countries of Europe.

EFAD's ambitions:

- Realise the contribution that dietitians can make to the improvement of nutritional health in Europe.
- Support the role of all National Dietetic Associations to contribute to the sustainability of economic and social health through influencing decision-makers both locally and in Europe.
- Embed best quality and evidenced-based dietetic practice in Europe through collaboration and partnership
- Promote education and lifelong learning in order to raise and maintain European dietetic standards

Membership of EFAD is open all National Associations of Dietitians from member states of the European Union. EFAD currently has 31 member associations, representing over 30,000 dietitians in 25 European countries.

Definition of a Dietitian:

A dietitian is a person with a qualification in Nutrition & Dietetics recognised by a national authority. The dietitian applies the science of nutrition to the feeding and education of groups of people and individuals in both health and disease.

For further information please visit the web site: www.efad.org

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