

Building a Brighter Tomorrow: Diversity, Mentoring, and the Future of Dietetics

THE ACADEMY OF NUTRITION AND Dietetics continues to grow year after year, both in membership and in our global reach, with more connections around the world and increased visibility in the United States. As evidence of the economic and public health implications of the obesity epidemic mounts, demand for expert nutrition research and guidelines increases—and Academy members are the best-qualified professionals to meet that need. But the challenge of optimizing the nation's health is not a simple one, and the ongoing effort to address it will require new approaches from a new generation of food and nutrition leaders.

Who will those new leaders be? As our nation becomes increasingly diverse, it's important that the membership of the Academy and leadership in the profession of dietetics reflect that diversity. Minority populations in the United States experience a disproportionate amount of nutrition-related illness, so reaching them is of paramount importance. The articles on diversity in this supplement explore opportunities and challenges associated with increasing diversity in dietetics.

In "The Balancing Act of Diversity Initiatives" (p S6), Karen Stein, MFA, lays the foundation for our discussion of diversity by providing an extensive exploration of the rationale behind diversity initiatives and examining the strategies other organizations have employed in pursuit of diversifying their membership and professions. She follows that up with an investigation of one of the more successful methods of increasing diversity in "The Educational Pipeline and Diversity in Dietetics" (p S13). This article explains the importance of reaching underrepresented groups early in their educational development. Increasing awareness of and exposure to a profession, and providing

access to academic support in subjects related to the profession—all before students choose specific college degree programs—increases applications, enrollees, and graduates in that field.

Jennifer Doley, MBA, RD, CNSD, provides a dietetic internship director's perspective on a specific issue in diversity recruitment in her article on English as a Second Language (ESL) dietetics students (p S20). With the proportion of the US population whose first language is not English at nearly 20% and rising, devising strategies to incorporate this group into dietetics education programs has become essential.

Finally, Cynthia J. Heiss, PhD, RD, and colleagues focus on the growing US Hispanic population, which faces significant health disparities (p S24). They emphasize the importance of ensuring that current practitioners are well-versed in the cultural beliefs and practices of this population in order to best serve them, but also call for increased recruitment of Hispanics into the dietetics profession.

When it comes to the composition of Academy membership and the dietetics profession as a whole, it's clear that increasing diversity is a step in the right direction—but it's only the first step. The next generation of practitioners will also need the assistance of their peers to help maximize their potential and make the greatest possible impact on our nation's health. That's where mentoring comes in. Lifelong learning is a foundational principle of the Academy, and mentoring relationships are a mutually beneficial way for practitioners young and old to embody that principle. The Academy offers its own eMentoring program, and encourages affiliates, dietetic practice groups, and member interest groups to develop their own programs as well. The articles in the second half of this supplement describe the myriad forms mentoring can take and the benefits it offers to both mentors and mentees.

"Mentoring 101: Building a Mentoring Relationship" (p S29) provides information on the basic structure of a

typical mentoring program, with specific insight into the roles of both mentors and mentees, as well as advice on how best to set up, conduct, and evaluate a mentoring relationship. One of today's most popular forms of mentoring is e-mentoring, with most or all of the interactions between mentor and mentee conducted online. Susie An and *Journal* editor Ryan Lipscomb explain the way e-mentoring programs work, and how they can provide access to professional advice to a larger and more varied audience—including those from underrepresented groups or geographically isolated areas (p S32).

Lynne Mangan expands on e-mentoring, including in-depth information on the Academy's eMentoring program in "The Many Modes of Mentoring: New Spins on the Classic Relationship" (p S38). She also provides examples of the wide variety of possible shapes a mentoring relationship can take, such as reverse mentoring, in which a junior person assists a more experienced professional, often in the development of a new technical skill.

Closing out this section of the supplement is Tony Peregrin's article on one of the most direct and tangible benefits of mentoring—Continuing Professional Education (CPE) credit (p S42). Offering CPE to those who volunteer for mentoring programs has proven to be an excellent way to encourage participation, and this article outlines the many ways in which mentoring can be a rewarding professional development experience.

By bringing together information on both diversity and mentoring, the articles presented in this supplement to the *Journal* provide a unique perspective on issues that will have a significant impact on the future of dietetics. Whether you're an experienced practitioner or a student just beginning your dietetics education, we hope they inspire you to get involved in shaping the future of our profession.

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