



## General Information about Dietitians in Germany and the Registration of Dietitians trained outside of Germany

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### Education of Dietitians in Germany

Dietitians (*germ. Diätassistent*<sup>1</sup>) in Germany are considered health professionals, like nurses, physiotherapists, midwives, etc. and their professions are protected by federal law. Each health profession has its own legal framework. Dietitians are governed by the “Dietitian Law”, which also regulates the content of educational programs and professional registration [1]. Only state licensed schools can conduct educational programs for state registered dietitians. The education of health professionals in Germany (except physicians and pharmacists) is unique (Berufsfachschulausbildung) in that it is neither “vocational training” nor “university (academic) training”.

The original intent was to provide health professionals with a high standard of professional knowledge with a primary focus on applied work, as opposed to research or independent academic work.

The education of dietitians is comprised of 3.050 hours of theoretical training and 1.400 hours of practical training [1]. The three year program ends with a theoretical, practical and oral state examination. Successful graduates obtain the title of “Diätassistent” [*engl. Dietitian*] and are registered within the state (Bundesland) where state examination took place. The title “dietitian” is protected by law. Registered dietitians in Germany have a wide range of work fields and can further specialise their skills (e.g. diabetes, enteral feeding, paediatric, administrative, etc.).

Despite their professional status, continuing academic advancement is not possible. According to the “Information System of the Federal Health Monitoring” (GBE) 14.000 dietitians worked in German hospitals, clinics and nursing homes in 2007 [2]. Approx. 4.000 dietitians are member of the German Dietitian Association (VDD) [3]. Despite the fact that there is no academic recognition of dietitians in Germany the results of research done by EFAD (European Federation of the Association of the Associations of Dietitians) in 2003 shows, that work fields of dietitians in Germany do not differ from the work fields of dietitians in other European countries. Furthermore, the German non-academic education offers more hours of training than some (academic) dietetic programs in some other European countries [4].

The German Dietitian Association is currently working on different concepts for an academic recognition of dietitians and the changing of the professional title. However, a first cycle academic education of dietitians in Germany will only be possible, if the German parliament has been convinced to change the German dietitian law, which regulates the education of dietitian on state licensed schools.

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<sup>1</sup> At present in the German speaking countries three professions are dietitians according to the international definition of a dietitian: Germany: Diätassistent, Austria: Diaetologe, Switzerland: Ernährungsberater HF/FH



### **Counselling in Nutrition and Dietetics in Germany**

In addition to state registered dietitians other professions (e.g. ecotrophologists and nutritionists\*\*\*) work in the field of dietetics and nutrition too, e.g. performing counselling in nutrition and dietetics. This is possible due to the fact that the dietitian law regulates the professional title, educational program etc. for dietitians. The work fields for dietitians, such as counselling in nutrition and dietetics, is not regulated and protected by law.

Since 2001 legal regulations have been established to protect clients and patients from frivolous nutrition consultants. These regulations only concern the refund of expenses through the statutory health insurance (SHI) (Krankenkasse) in regard to participation in courses in preventive nutrition. Refunds for counselling in special diets are not regulated and depend on the SHI.

In 2000 the German Dietitian Association brought a legal action against the fact that dietary intervention is not a therapy like physiotherapy. In 2000 the “Federal Social Court” (BSG) declared that dietary intervention is a therapy [5]. Now the “Federal Joint Committee” (G-BA) has to decide if dietary intervention will be adopted in the “Guideline on Remedies” (Heilmittelrichtlinie). In the case of the adoption in the “Guideline on Remedies” a dietary intervention has to be paid from the SHI if necessary. The G-BA has not made any decision to date [6].

However, if ecotrophologists or nutritionists offer counselling in nutrition and dietetics they must have further training in dietetics due to its differences to other fields. Clients cannot claim a refund for expenses for counselling in nutrition if the practitioner has not had this further education. Dietitians have to prove their continuous further education by showing the SHI a specific certificate from an accredited association, such as the German Dietitian Association [6].

### **Registration of Dietitians trained outside of Germany**

The 16 states in Germany (Bundesländer) are responsible for the registration of health professions. Generally applicants have to have a good command of German language and have to provide proven copies of their certificates. The authorities responsible for the registration can be found under the following link: <http://www.aerzteblatt-student.de/doc.asp?docid=101256>.

Especially for applicants from countries in the European Union the Directive 2005/36/EC (The European Parliament and the Council of the European Union Directive 2005/36/EC on the recognition of professional qualifications) could be very helpful (page 34). The Directive is available under the following link in English (the document is available in all European languages):

<http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2005:255:0022:0142:EN:PDF>

If you have any questions, don't hesitate to contact us!

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\*\*\* Ecotrophology (*germ. Oecotrophologie or Ökotrophologie*) is only known in the German speaking countries (Germany, Austria and Switzerland). It's a university level course which leads to a Bachelor or Master degree. Due to the Bologna declaration in all European countries Bachelor and Master degrees have been launched. Before this, there was also the option of obtaining a "Diplom" at a German university, which took 4-5 years.

Ecotrophologists (*germ. Oecotrophologe or Ökotrophologe*) study Home economics, nutrition and food science. They can specialise in dietetics or in nutrition but there is no "state registered program" or other quality criteria for the university education in this field. This makes it very difficult to give a statement about the practical and theoretical knowledge of an ecotrophologist because, the states in Germany (Bundesländer) together with the universities independently regulate university education.

There may be ecotrophologists with an excellent theoretical and practical knowledge in dietetics and nutrition but this has to be proven individually. However, ecotrophologists are not "health professionals" (bundesrechtlich geregelter Heilberuf) or dietitians according to Federal German Law and the international definition of a dietitian [7].

Nutritionists (*germ. Ernährungswissenschaftler*) are also known in Germany. Education and regulations concerning the education of nutritionists can be compared with the situation of the ecotrophologists. The difference is, that nutritionist study only nutrition and not home economics.

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| [1] | [ <i>German Dietitian Law, 1994</i><br>Gesetz über den Beruf der Diätassistentin und des Diätassistenten (Diätassistentengesetz - DiätAssG), 8. März 1994   |
| [2] | [ <i>Information System of the Federal Health Monitoring</i><br>Gesundheitsberichterstattung des Bundes (GBE): Online im Internet: <a href="http://www.gbe-bund.de/">http://www.gbe-bund.de/</a> , 05.06.2009   |
| [3] | [ <i>German Dietitian Association</i><br>Verband der Diätassistenten – Deutscher Bundesverband e.V. (VDD): Online im Internet: <a href="http://www.vdd.de/">http://www.vdd.de/</a> , 05.06.2009   |
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| [5] | [ <i>Federal Joint Committee</i><br>Gemeinsamer Bundesausschuss (G-BA): Online im Internet: <a href="http://www.g-ba.de/institution/sys/english/">http://www.g-ba.de/institution/sys/english/</a> , 05.06.2009  |
| [6] | [ <i>Working Group of the Head Organisation of the German Statutory Health Insurances: Guideline Prevention, Applying the §§ 20 and 20a of the German Code of Social Law</i> ]<br>Arbeitsgemeinschaft der Spitzenverbände der Krankenkassen: Leitfaden Prävention, Gemeinsame und einheitliche Handlungsfelder und Kriterien der Spitzenverbände der Krankenkassen zur Umsetzung von §§ 20 und 20a SGB V vom 21. Juni 2000 in der Fassung vom 2. Juni 2008, KomPart Verlagsgesellschaft mbH & Co.KG, Bonn/Frankfurt am Main, 2008 |
| [7] | International Confederation of the Dietetic Association (ICDA) and European Association of the Associations of Dietitians (EFAD): Definition of a Dietitian, 2004   |