Activities of the German Dietitian Association

2008-2010 (Selection)

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Revision of the German Dietitian Law

First Dietitians in Germany were educated at the end of the 19th century and called "theoretical cooks". In the 20's of the last century nurses could attend a further education and were called diet nurses if they passed the exam successfully. At the same time the first schools for dietitians were established in Hamburg (1924), Berlin and Vienna. In 1937 the German Dietitian Law was established, which regulated the content of the education and the protection of the professional title. The subsequent laws for dietitians in East Germany, West Germany and Austria were based on this law. The last time the law was revised was in 1994 as a result of the German Unification. The law regulates education, state licensed schools for dietitians and protects the professional title. According to this law in Germany dietitians have to be educated at state licensed schools. These schools are usually run by university hospitals and hospitals. Education of dietitians is only permitted in these schools and not in other institutions e.g. university. Thus an academic education for dietitians in Germany is not possible.

One of the aims of the German Dietitians Association is the revision of the Dietitian Law:

- **Changing of the professional title:** the professional title for dietitians in Germany is "Diätassistent". This title does not reflect the service provided by dietitians and does not reflect the statutory goal of the education which is being personally responsible for the provision of diet therapy and nutritional counseling (and not assisting someone to perform diet therapy). Furthermore the professional title causes problems in Germany and other countries due to the suffix “assistent”. Many dietitians don’t identify with this professional title and feel discriminated against by this professional title. The German Dietitians Association suggested the title “Diaetologe” (dietologist) as this is the professional title in Austria since 2005.

- **Changing of the content of the education:** the new content of the education should have a stronger focus on the European Competence Statements for dietitians and on...
the competences which are required nowadays, which means more competences in counseling and therapy. Therefore inter alia the “Nutrition Care Process” and the concept of “Clinical Reasoning” must be obligatory in the education of dietitians

- Academic education or academic further education for dietitians: the education for dietitians in Germany has to be an academic education in general or academic programs have to be established which allows obtaining a bachelor degree in dietetics for qualified (non-academic) dietitians. These programs have to take into account the previous education of these dietitians and thus they should not be longer the 3-4 semesters.

Other health professionals have the same problems as dietitians as all health professionals in Germany are regulated the same way. Therefore the German Dietitian Association established a working group together with other health professionals

**Diet therapy as a remedy**

In addition to state registered dietitians other professions (e.g. ecotrophologists\(^1\) and nutritionists) work in the field of dietetics and nutrition too, e.g. performing counseling 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 counseling 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 counseling in special diets are not regulated and depend on the SHI.

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\(^1\) Ecotrophologists study Home Economics, Nutrition and Food Technology and can specialize in several fields e.g. Nutrition and dietetics. But there 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. Ecotrophologists and Nutritionist are not health professionals according to German Law and do not fulfill the criteria’s of the Definition of a Dietitian.
According to these legal regulations ecotrophologists and nutritionists must have further training in dietetics due to its differences to other fields. Clients cannot claim a refund for expenses for counseling 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.

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

If the G-BA decisions is positive and diet therapy is adopted in the “Guidelines on Remedies” the G-BA has to make a decision on the profession delivering this service. As not only dietitians are involved in diet therapy but dietitians are the only health professions in the field of nutrition and dietetics according to German Law, the German Dietitians Association commissioned a legal opinion in 2009. The result of the legal opinion is that at this stage only dietitians can be allowed to deliver this service.

**Work fields and the Profession of Dietitians in Germany**

Although information on dietitians’ professional profile and their work fields is required for the implementation of related political decisions and for this group’s further professionalization efforts, no current research data are available in this field. Such data are also relevant for health services research, as they deliver information on how routine diet therapy and nutrition counseling are currently being provided. In order to gain insight in the aforementioned issues, a self-administered questionnaire was distributed as part of the December 2009 issue of ‘Diät und Information’, the journal of the German Dietitian Association (VDD).

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2 The legal opinion was also commissioned to provide facts for the political approaches of the German Dietitian Association in order to have the Dietitian law revised.
The response rate was 27.2%. 98.1% of the participants were female, 76.8% were dietitians and 23.2% were student dietitians.

54.5% of the respondents were employed in hospitals and nursing homes. 85.4% of the dietitians reported performing diet therapy and nutritional counseling, whereas 54.0% were involved in food service management. The most reported medical disciplines in which dietitians are active are diabetology, gastroenterology and internal medicine. 75.3% of all dietitians have completed at least one further education cycle. Our results show a high professional satisfaction among dietitians, as 80.2% of all interviewees would still become a dietitian, if they could choose again. The present data deliver insight into the professional profile of dietitians in Germany and their multifaceted work fields. Furthermore the data describe the contribution of dietitians to the German health care system.

The results of this survey have been published and more publications will come.

Political activities, Speeches, Conferences

- Talks with politicians on state, federal and European level (2008-2010): 144

- Speeches on congresses (2008-2010): 44

- Involvement in Conferences organized by schools for dietitians (2008-2010): 9

- Organization of conferences (2008-2010): 1 EFAD GM and 2nd DIETS Conference, 3 annual conferences of the German Dietitians Association

More...

- Revision of the Quality Standards for Dietitians together with the Dietitians Associations of Austria
• Lounge of the new Website of the German Dietitians Association in 2010 (www.vdd.de)

• Revision of the further education offered by the German Dietitians Association
  (the German Dietitians Association offers several further education courses for Dietitians in Pediatrics, Enteral Feeding, Parenteral Feeding, Geriatric, Obesity, Refresher courses for Dietitians)

• Revision of the documentation for freelance dietitians

• Working group “standardized language and terminology” together with the German speaking countries and regions (Germany, Austria, Switzerland, Liechtenstein, South Tyrol)

• Establishing the ICF Code for Dietetics in Germany followed by the Dutch example

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