

# Professional Guidelines

## Mission Statement and Principles for the Professional Conduct of Members of VDD e.V. (German Association of Dietitians)

### **Preamble**

Dietitians make a quality-assured contribution to the healthcare of the population. Their profession is the only nationally regulated health profession with a protected professional title in the field of nutrition, based on a standardized practical training and examination regulation with a state examination. The professional field of action is dietetics, where dietitians act independently, responsibly, and in a process-oriented manner. They enable, support, and accompany individuals and groups to adopt a diet that is therapeutically appropriate, safe, sensorially appealing, and sustainable according to their needs and circumstances.

Dietetics includes therapeutic, rehabilitative, palliative, health-promoting, and preventive measures to maintain, promote, restore, and improve health, as well as to preserve functional ability and participation in all areas of life.

## **§1 Therapeutic Understanding**

1.1 Dietitians practice according to recognized standards (*lege artis*<sup>1</sup>, Code of Good Practice [ICDA]). Their actions are evidence-based, consider the current state of scientific knowledge and available technologies, and are oriented toward the needs of patients.

1.2 Dietitians respect the human dignity of their patients. As a health profession, they follow the medical-ethical principles of the International Code of Ethics [ICDA]: autonomy, non-maleficence, beneficence, and justice. This also applies in the context of digitalization and the use of artificial intelligence.

1.3 Their therapeutic decision-making is based on the informed consent of their patients. In doing so, dietitians proceed in a participatory manner. They respect and consider the living and nutritional situation, dietary habits, life stage, social, biographical, psychological, cultural, and religious background, as well as the societal context of individuals and groups.

1.4 Dietitians proceed in a process-oriented manner (German Nutrition Care Process) and observe the principle of cost-effectiveness.

1.5 Dietitians advocate for food and nutrition security, support sustainable dietary decisions, and promote nutritional care with the best possible minimization of harmful environmental and climate effects.

1.6 Dietitians interact respectfully and collegially in personal exchanges and/or on social media.

1.7 Dietitians promote their own health and handle their physical, psychological, and material resources with care.

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<sup>1</sup> **Lege artis** (“according to the rules of the art,” from Latin *lex, legis* meaning “law” and *ars, artis* meaning “art”; English: *State of the Art*) is the legal principle in liability law whereby a contractual obligation must be fulfilled in accordance with the state of scientific knowledge, the recognized rules of technology, societal norms or legal standards, and through the application of physical and intellectual abilities, skills, and knowledge.

## **§2 Legal Compliance as Health Professionals**

Dietitians comply with the legal norms applicable to the independently performed activities within their professional scope as a health profession. This results in the following obligations:

2.1 Duty to Inform and Educate (§ 630e BGB) –Dietitians explain the circumstances essential to their treatment and provide information about any potential costs.

2.2 Duty of Documentation (§ 603f BGB) –Dietitians document all measures and outcomes that are professionally relevant for current and future treatment. In the context of medical directives or prescriptions, they prepare a final report. They comply with the legally required data protection criteria and retention periods for patient documentation.

2.3 Duty of Confidentiality (§ 203 StGB) –Dietitians are obligated to maintain confidentiality in the course of their professional activities. They do not disclose entrusted or known information and data to third parties without authorization. This applies to written and oral communications, reports, findings, and records. Exceptions apply to collaboration with other professional groups in the healthcare sector and with the consent of the patients.

2.4 Integrity (§ 229a StGB) –Dietitians make professional decisions regarding prescriptions, dispensing, and referrals free from improper influence.

## **§3 Intra- and Interprofessional Collaboration**

3.1 In the development of therapeutic concepts and the derivation of dietary measures, dietitians work closely within their professional group and with physicians and other professional groups in the healthcare sector.

3.2 Collaboration within the professional group and with members of other professional groups in the healthcare sector is based on cooperation, loyalty, mutual recognition, and the safeguarding of respective competencies.

#### **§4 Continuing Education and Professional Development**

4.1 Dietitians engage in continuous education and professional development. Lifelong learning is understood as a process within their own professional biography and as a means of personal and professional advancement.

4.2 Continuing education and professional development are aimed at maintaining and expanding professional, methodological, and personal competencies.

4.3 It should be self-evident to regularly attend, document, and provide proof of continuing education and professional development activities according to a points system established by the National Dietetic Association. The association offers its own continuing education certificate.

#### **§5 Professional Practice**

5.1 Dietitians practice their profession in accordance with the principles of these professional guidelines. They enter into contracts only if they do not contradict these principles.

5.2 Dietitians may work independently and entrepreneurially. This requires responsible management of the practice, in which all applicable legal regulations must be observed.

5.3 Remuneration for freelance work

Dietitians negotiate remuneration that is proportionate to the nature, complexity, and scope of their work. In doing so, customary rates—based on the recommendations of the professional association—are not exceeded or undercut in an unfair manner.

## **§6 Advertising**

6.1 Dietitians have the right to advertise their services, provided this does not violate laws<sup>2</sup> or these professional guidelines. Publications or public appearances of any kind must serve the purpose of profiling and professionalizing dietetics and the profession.

6.2 It is permissible to use informational materials in written or electronic form for advertising purposes related to one's own person/practice in accordance with §6.1.

6.3 It is impermissible, in connection with the activity as a dietitian, to advertise commercial activities/products and/or remedies that contradict evidence-based dietetics. Advertising prohibitions based on legal provisions remain unaffected.

## **§7 Violations**

The professional guidelines form the basis for the values upheld by members of the VDD and thereby for the reputation of the association as well as the entire profession. Violations are sanctioned in accordance with the statutes.

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<sup>2</sup> Medicinal Products Advertising Act (Heilmittelwerbegesetz) and Act Against Unfair Competition (Gesetz gegen den unlauteren Wettbewerb)

## Copyright Notice

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### Editorial Notes

First edition from December 1997 as a completely revised and expanded version of the “Thoughts on Ethics in the Profession of Dietitians” (compiled by the Committee of Dietetic Associations in the European Community), 1978 edition.

First revised edition pursuant to the resolution of the General Assembly dated 07 May 2010, includes the “International Code of Ethics and Code of Good Practice” (International Confederation of Dietetic Associations [ICDA], September 2008).

Second revised and expanded edition pursuant to the resolution of the General Assembly dated 15 May 2025, taking into account the *Supplementary Document to the Current International Code of Ethics* (EFAD 2022).