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Members Share Their Experience in Developing a Policy and Procedure for the Prescription of Therapeutic Diets

In an insert in the Fall 1997 issue of *Résumé*, the College explained that the prescription of therapeutic diets is not a controlled act. However, as a therapeutic diet may be considered a

form of treatment, the article advised dietitians working in health care facilities, particularly public hospitals, to ensure that they are permitted to prescribe therapeutic diets under the policy of their employers. When prescribing therapeutic diets, dietitians should also ensure that any consent requirements, including those under the *Health Care Consent Act*, are met. In the following articles, Bill Franks, a registered dietitian in Thunder Bay, and Deborah Wildish, a registered dietitian in Toronto, share their experience on the issue of prescribing or revising diet orders.

Experience at St. Joseph's Care Group

by **Bill Franks, RD**, St. Joseph's Care Group, Thunder Bay

St. Joseph's Care Group in Thunder Bay includes St. Joseph's Hospital, St. Joseph's Heritage and Westmount Hospital. The Care Group is also the host agency for Diabetes Health Thunder Bay. Programs and services are provided in complex chronic care, rehabilitation, long term care, supportive housing and longer term mental health. There are eleven dietitians employed by the Care Group and Diabetes Health.

In the Fall 1997 *Résumé*, there was a question and answer section that addressed the issue of RDs prescribing diets in a public hospital. From this information, it became clear to the RDs of St. Joseph's Care Group that a written policy authorizing dietitians to prescribe diets was necessary to continue to provide individualized client centred nutritional care within an appropriate time frame.

The first step was discussing the need for this policy at the Care Group's RD Quality Practice Council meeting of January 1998. There was some discussion as to whether this should be a medical directive or a policy issue. Since it is not a controlled act and within an RD's scope of practice, it was concluded that there is no need for a medical directive. A Care Group policy would be sufficient to give RDs the administrative sanction required to

prescribe therapeutic diets. The College of Dietitians acted as a resource providing impartial information to all of the involved parties.

In June 1999, after a few starts and rewrites, the Medical Advisory Committee approved in principle the creation of a policy for RDs to prescribe diets. The finalized policy and procedure which were approved by the Medical Advisory Committee on October 10, 1999 state that:

"Dietitians employed at St. Joseph's Care Group are authorized to prescribe therapeutic diets."

PROCEDURE

A note in the physician's progress note section of the chart is the minimum documentation required when a registered dietitian prescribes a therapeutic diet.

There may also be further documentation in the form of nutrition assessments, clinical nutrition notes, nutrition care plans and progress notes in place in the assessment section of the chart and/or the multidisciplinary progress notes section of the chart.

When a physician diet order is in place and the registered dietitian, based on his/her assessment, recommends that the diet order be changed, this will be documented as a request for a diet order change."

Experience at Toronto Rehabilitation Institute

by **Deborah Wildish, RD, M.A.**, Corporate Professional Leader, Dietetics and Coordinator, Clinical Nutrition, ARAMARK Canada Ltd.

The Toronto Rehabilitation Institute (Toronto Rehab) is an amalgamation of the former Rehabilitation Institute of Toronto, Lyndhurst Hospital and the Toronto Rehabilitation Centre. It comprises five centres and six clinical programs which provide adult rehabilitation and complex continuing care.

In June 1996, dietitians at Toronto Rehab developed a report that included a recommendation for dietitians to be authorized to revise diet and tube feeding orders. Recognizing the potential of this recommendation in eliminating barriers to expedient patient-centred care, physicians in the Complex Continuing Care program

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supported the recommendation. This evolved into a dietetic professional practice opportunity across all Toronto Rehab inpatient programs.

With the assistance of a professional practice consultant, a medical directive entitled *Dietitian Revision of Diet and Tube Feeding Orders* was developed following a pre-existing template. In order to complement this medical directive, both the *Interprofessional Policy – Diet and Tube Feeding Order Process* and the *Diet Compendium* were revised to provide clear guidelines for writing consistent and complete diet and tube feeding orders. A quality monitoring program was developed which includes monitoring the timeliness of changes to diet and tube feeding order.

The above documents were finalized in collaboration with key stakeholders including nurses and speech language pathologists and in consultation with the College of Dietitians of Ontario. The medical directive was approved by the Medical Advisory Committee on September 9, 1999 and was successfully implemented on September 27, 1999.

A SUMMARY OF THE APPROVED POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

Dietitians screen and assess all inpatients in accordance with profession-specific policies related to standards of care, nutritional assessment and clinical practice guidelines, and the Toronto Rehab Diet Compendium and Enteral Formulary.

Whenever a dietitian identifies the need for a change in a diet or tube feeding order following a nutritional intervention, the dietitian documents the rationale for the order change on a Nutrition Charting Module or in the Interprofessional Progress Notes. The dietitian writes the order on the Physician Order Sheets. The order is implemented immediately without physician approval, even if this involves changing the existing diet or tube feeding order written by a physician. However, the initiation and termination of tube feeding must be authorized by a physician. D

Launch of www.cdo.on.ca

Council has recognized that in order to promote excellent dietetic practice in Ontario and to increase the public's awareness of its rights under the *Regulated Health Professions Act*, the College must be able to communicate with members and the public in a timely manner. To further this end, CDO will be adding a web site to its existing communication tools which include this newsletter, the toll-free line, facsimile and e-mail. This web site will be available to members as well as to the public. The following information will be available on the web site:

- registration requirements and procedures;
- CDO regulations, proposed regulation;
- professional standards and guidelines;
- CDO programs including quality assurance and patient relations programs;
- Complaints, Discipline and Fitness to Practise processes; and
- College publications.

The launch of the web site is tentatively scheduled for **April 18, 2000**. We invite you to visit our web site and give us your comments.

Spring 2000 Examination

The next Canadian Dietetic Registration Examination has been scheduled for **May 27, 2000**. Candidates who wish to write this examination in order to register with the College must have their complete applications received by the College no later than the following dates:

- graduates from accredited internship/practicum programs – March 22, 2000
- graduates from non-accredited practicum programs – March 1, 2000