

# What Self-Regulation Means to Me



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President

*The College of Dietitians of Ontario exists to regulate and support all Registered Dietitians in the interest of the public of Ontario.*

*We are dedicated to the ongoing enhancement of safe, ethical and competent nutrition services provided by Registered Dietitians in their changing practice environments.*

Under the *Regulated Health Professions Act, 1991*, and the *Dietetics Act, 1991*, Registered Dietitians in Ontario have the privilege of being a self-regulated profession. This is something I have heard since I joined the College over 20 years ago. But what does this really mean?

In short, self-regulation means that we, as RDs, have the legal right to participate in the regulation of our own profession in the best interest of the public. We have an opportunity to sit as a Councillor on the College Council and to sit on College committees. This allows us to have a direct impact on our profession. As we bring our professional knowledge and experience to the decision-making table, we can offer a valued dietetic perspective on College governance and profession regulation.

My own understanding of self-regulation has evolved since I was first encouraged to run for Council by a colleague a few years ago. Initially, I thought, “what could I contribute? Do I have the skills and knowledge required?” I have realized that just being an RD is enough. As RDs, we each bring a unique set of knowledge, experiences and perspectives to the table.

Since being elected to Council in 2010, I have had the opportunity to gain more valuable skills, to grow professionally and to learn from RDs across the province. My confidence has grown from doubting my ability to participate in College work to trusting in my experience and knowledge as an RD to serve the College as President.

Many of you may be asking yourself, like I did, “what can I contribute?” There are several ways for you to participate in the regulation of your profession. Here are three suggestions:

- 1. Get elected as a Councillor.** Being a Registered Dietitian is all you need. You do not need to have years of experience, nor be an expert in any particular area of dietetics, or even be well versed on Council governance. You need to be willing to bring your perspective to the Council table to make decisions related to College governance and profession self-regulation in the interest of public safety. All training is provided.
- 2. Consider applying to be appointed on a committee.** Council appoints RDs to committees once a year in June. The bulk of the engaging, thought-provoking discussions take place at the committee tables. Many committee members comment that committee work is a satisfying experience. It is also at the committee level where RDs are able to network with other RDs from across the province. All training is provided.
- 3. Respond to College communications.** Although responding to surveys is a less formal way to participate in self-regulation, opportunities to provide input are available to every dietitian in Ontario. Member input provides different perspectives, stimulates discussion and helps us come to better decisions. All member comments are carefully reviewed and analyzed by staff and Council before final decisions are made.

I encourage everyone to have a voice at the table. Previously, when I reviewed documents from the College for comment I usually thought to myself, “hmm...looks good, I have nothing to add” and did not submit any comments. In hindsight, I realize that all comments – even comments on what looks good – are useful as they help the College understand the membership’s range of opinions. Be sure your ideas are heard. Respond to surveys if you have not done so before.

Thank you to the many members who provide input into our surveys and who participate in College work. If you have

not connected with the College in the past with your thoughts and perspectives, I encourage you to do so now. The College staff and Council members value member input: it is the “self” in self-regulation.

As a result of your contribution, we are a stronger College and we are better able to meet our mandate of public protection by regulating and supporting RDs to provide safe, ethical and quality dietetic services.



## How will the Registrar decide if charges are relevant to a member’s suitability to practice?



Melisse L. Willems, MA, LLB  
Registrar & ED

If someone were to ask you to make a decision using your discretion, what would it mean to you? You’d probably take it to mean that you were free to use your own judgement to make that decision. It would likely imply that you had the expertise and experience needed to make the decision, that you were a responsible decision-maker and that your ability to make decisions could be trusted. Registered Dietitians are a good example of this. The College expects members to use their own discretion to make competent and safe client-centred decisions in their practice, based on their knowledge and skills.

The College also makes discretionary decisions on a number of fronts. Members picked up on this recently when the College circulated draft by-laws for consultation which will require members to provide the College with information about charges, bail conditions and convictions that may be published on the College’s website. The by-laws have now been approved by Council and will come into effect January 1, 2016. What concerned members who commented on the by-laws was that they give the Registrar & ED the authority to determine which charges, bail conditions and convictions are relevant to a member’s suitability to practice and are to be published on the Register of Dietitians. Members wanted to know, “what does it mean to determine that something is relevant to a member’s suitability to practice”, and “just how is the Registrar’s discretion going to be exercised?”

I was in Ottawa at the end of September giving a presentation to a number of federal and other regulators on this very topic. In particular, I discussed what regulatory discretion is and what it isn’t.

### WHAT IS REGULATORY DISCRETION?

Regulatory discretion is acting with reasoned judgement, relevance, good faith, proper purpose and independence. It is NOT arbitrariness. Legislation and by-laws allow for discretionary