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European Federation of the Associations of Dietitians Professional Practice Committee (PPC)

Vision paper: The implementation of a Nutrition Care Process (NCP) and Standardized Language (SL) among dietitians in Europe

Vision 2020

- Dietitians in Europe are using standardized terminology and work according to a nutrition care process model.
- All Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) have included a nutrition care process model and a standardized language for dietitians in their curriculum.
- National Dietetic Associations (NDAs) encourage and facilitate dietitians to use a nutrition care process in various practice settings.
- Dietitians have implemented a standardized language in research to enable a global collaboration.

Background/Introduction

The EFAD Professional Practice Committee (PPC) serves its members by facilitating communication and collaboration among dietetic professionals in different European countries. The mission of the EFAD PPC is to

“support the National Dietetic Associations (NDAs) to enhance the professional practice of its members. Such communication and collaboration will facilitate the preservation of safety and welfare of dietetic service users. It will also support the building of social trust in the dietetic profession throughout Europe”.

One crucial way to achieve this is by working within Europe to define and develop best practices. In light of recent research, the use of standardized language (SL) has been identified as a key practice tool to advance the level of practice to a higher level and support its integrity.

EFAD recommends all NDAs to support the access and use of a chosen Nutrition Care Process/Dietetic Process (NCP) model and a SL developed for dietitians. This can include but is not limited to licensing, translation and development of support materials and activities such as written materials, webinars, workshops, discussion groups, and websites.

Nutrition Care Process and Standardised Language

Throughout Europe more than one defined NCP model and SL for dietitians are being used to document dietetic care. A standardized language is the tool to document the nutrition care process. As such, a SL must be able to document and reflect all phases of a NCP, namely assessment, diagnoses, intervention, monitoring and evaluation. The application of SL is a necessary foundation to facilitate pan-European sharing of information on dietetic practice. Recent studies among NDAs in Europe suggest that the Nutrition Care Process model and the International Dietetics and Nutrition Terminology (IDNT) developed by the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics (1-3) were most commonly used (4,5). To date, in Europe the IDNT has been translated into several languages and other NDAs are planning to translate. One more SL named the international classification of functioning, disability and Health for Dietitians (ICF-dietetics) (6) was used in the Netherlands.

The Nutrition Care Process and model as defined by the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics is a client-centered approach to dietetic intervention including a stepwise process starting with nutrition assessment leading to a nutrition diagnosis that is intervened and later monitored and evaluated. A nutrition diagnosis is the nutrition problem that can be resolved or improved through a nutrition intervention by a dietitian. The nutrition diagnosis is different from a medical diagnosis and changes as the client responds to the nutrition intervention (7).

The use of a common SL would enable the aggregation of information by NDAs in Europe. For example, a collaboration to study the frequency of documented nutritional diagnoses encountered in clinical practice and their outcomes would be of much general interest. Such data would also assist to identify the most important/frequent nutrition diagnoses reported throughout Europe and their level of promoting successful interventions and outcomes.

Education

In order to move the dietetic profession forward, it is necessary to have a workforce that is trained to practice and document according to an NCP-model and a SL developed for dietitians. EFAD's vision is therefore that all Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) will include an NCP-model and a SL for dietitians in their curriculum.

That means:

Educators and practice placement dietitians need to be trained and become familiar with NCP-models and SL and have support in teaching it to students and interns.

Students need to be given the opportunity to practice and document using an NCP model and a SL during their practice placement.

Collaboration between EFAD's PPC and Education Committee would contribute to the identification and prioritization of issues and areas that will facilitate the successful integration and application of the NCP-model and a SL in educational/practice placement settings and life long learning opportunities.

Professional Practice

In Europe increasing number of countries are moving towards the use of Electronic Medical Records (EMR). To enable dietitians to record their practice, the inclusion of SL in the EMR should be recognized as a priority by the NDAs. The NDAs should focus their efforts to identify EMR-related stakeholders.

Furthermore the NDAs should encourage dietitians to use a standardized NCP-model including assessment, diagnoses, intervention, monitoring and evaluation in their professional practice. NDAs may do this by issuing an official statement that endorses the use of NCP in practice and by encouraging the development of supporting materials for instructors as well as self-study materials for dietitians.

Research

To facilitate comparison between different research studies it is important to have comparable data recording processes and use a set of defined common terms. The use of a SL will enable a global understanding of terms crucial to the dietetic profession. This will also enable publications of multicentre studies as well as the aggregation of larger data sets from independent studies or even meta-analyses. Collaborations of this magnitude will support the documentation and publication of effective dietetic counselling outcomes which will increase recognition of dietetic services and move the dietetic profession to a higher level.

Collaboration between EFAD's PPC and Research Committee would contribute to the identification and prioritization of issues and topics that require research and investigation, leading to publications and presentations in the public as well as professional media.

Proposal and implementation

- a) A proposal is that in the next 7 years, a majority of dietitians in Europe will be using a standardized approach to assessment, diagnosis, monitoring and evaluation. And in 10 years, most dietitians in Europe will be using a SL that allows for seamless data accumulation and useful database development. Without a doubt, NDAs and their dietitians in Europe have still a great deal of work to do to be able to demonstrate that dietetics interventions contribute substantially to the wellbeing and safety of individuals and populations.
- b) EFAD encourages NDAs to contact their official bodies at national level (specifically those bodies that have decision-making authority) for assistance in introducing and implementing NCP and SL into dietetic practice on a national level. For example a Ministry of Health or an Order may be the official authority to approve the use of a SL in institutions such as hospitals. It is also important to investigate and collaborate with professionals working on health informatics and/or developers of electronic medical records (EMRs).
- c) EFAD has taken the lead in developing a European Network for SL for information exchange between EFAD member countries. EFAD will also provide the NDAs with regular updates about NCP and SL at conferences, workshops, newsletters etc. All Committees of EFAD will work proactively with the NDAs in their efforts to establish an NCP and SL process. To this end, EFAD invites all stakeholders at the individual and organizational level to send in new information on political developments, endorsements, agreements on new initiatives, collaborations, development of related products (from scholarly articles to developed tools), etc. as these become available. These materials will be available in a dedicated repository on the EFAD website. Through the work of EFAD on NCP and SL, EFAD will provide leadership and will function as a central hub of communication, networking, and consulting for European dietitians.

References

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