



## Ich bin Diätologin

... I've worked in this profession for more than 25 years. I started my career (at that time with a diploma in dietetics) in a hospital, where I worked for several years teaching and advising patients. After that I moved to the food industry, where I have continued to work in the fields of nutritional marketing and communication. At the same time I have written textbooks and continued my professional development in nutrition, dietetics, public relations and communication. As part of my "Life Long Learning" commitment I have continued to extend my knowledge of marketing and communication and in 2007 successfully completed my Master of Science in Communication.

I have been actively involved in the work of my Association since the start of my career. I realised from the beginning that the political side of the profession is very important and that the profession could only be advanced by including each individual member in political decisions.

I undertook various roles within the association and, for the last ten years, have had the honour of leading the Association as President. This voluntary position carries a great responsibility, as the politics of our profession and the representation of our profession have become increasingly demanding.

Also increasingly demanding are the topics and challenges which we as a professional body must face.

In the last 10 years, together with my team of committee members, I have been able to master many important and forward looking topics. In 2005 we achieved a milestone in the development of the profession of our profession: A parliamentary resolution was passed (BGBI I Nr. 70/2005) which raised the academic standards of teaching of dietetics and the professional name was changed from "dietary assistant" to „Dietologin/Diätologe“.

The background for this development was that the professional role had changed over the previous decades. Where previously dietary assistants had mainly planned and even prepared diet foods themselves, in recent years dietitians were personally accountable for developing, implementing and evaluating a dietary regime on receipt of a dietary prescription from a doctor. Dietary regimes can be administered to the patient orally, enterally or parenterally. The new name reflects the changed professional responsibility of dietitians, who have a core competence in dietetics and a high level of education and training.

The training leading to qualification as a dietitian is based on the Bologna process and is offered as a 3-year bachelor degree in advanced technical colleges. The education comprises 180 ECTS (European Credit Transfer System) and is designed to ensure that theory to be combined with practice-based training in such a way that occupational and cognitive skills are developed together. Graduates are entitled to practice dietetics and to call themselves *Diaetologe/Diaetologin*.

In Austria dietitians belong to a group of "medical-technical service providers". This group of state recognised health professionals contains six other professions: physiotherapists, speech therapists, occupational therapists, orthoptists, radiologists and biomedical scientists. Together with these other health professionals, we are described in the MTD legislation. (In Austria MTD is the governing body of the upper grade of professional health services). Education, activities and professional responsibilities are described in this legislation. Accordingly, in Austria, the treatment of people with pathological conditions can only be undertaken, on grounds of patient protection, by health professions regulated by law. Despite this restriction of practice increasingly many unqualified advisors are entering the nutritional field, presenting a challenge for the future.

The majority of dietitians work in hospitals, rehabilitation centres and outpatients. There are currently very few freelance dietitians. This is because in Austria nutritional therapy and counselling must be paid by the patient themselves.

However, if one considers, in particular the enormous increase in metabolic diseases, it seems that there will be increasing demand for freelance dietitians in the future.

As previously mentioned, professional politics and association work are becoming more demanding. The topics with which we are currently engaged, are registration of health professionals, the requirement for continuing education and training as well as quality assurance. Our profession must position itself correctly and take advantage of the changing work and environmental conditions.

As a professional association we are working on these tasks and it is our goal to occupy a strong position in the Austrian nutritional landscape. We consider exchange and cooperation with our European partner associations and EFAD to be very important. There will be many questions for which we will have to find solutions together – and together we can be really strong.

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