



PROFESSIONAL BOARD FOR DIETETICS AND NUTRITION

SCOPE OF PRACTICE: DIETITIANS

INTRODUCTION

This document serves to define the - scope of practice for Dietitians registered with the Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA), as regulated by the Professional Board for Dietetics and Nutrition (DNB) – herein after referred to as the Board). This document aims to guide Dietitians and to protect members of the public against unsafe and unethical professional conduct by Dietitians. This document should be read in conjunction with the current *Regulations defining the scope of profession for Dietitians (See attached- Annexure A)* and the HPCSA *Ethical Rules of Conduct*.

PURPOSE AND SCOPE OF THE DOCUMENT

The purpose of this document is to outline procedures, actions and processes for which Dietitians have the knowledge, skills and expertise to practise safely and effectively, while keeping with the applicable ethical and professional principles without posing any danger to the public. In order for Dietitians to deliver safe, high quality and equitable dietetics services to all, this document is applicable to all settings.

The document furthermore describes the role of Dietitians as members of the healthcare team and provides a detailed framework of what the scope of work of Dietitians entail. It also provides a framework for the quality of improvement programmes. As legislation and science are ever evolving, this document is dynamic in nature and will be amended when new legislation or science is introduced.

QUALIFICATIONS FOR DIETITIANS

In South Africa, Dietitians, complete a four-year degree in Dietetics and/or Nutrition which is at NQF level 8, and has a minimum of 480 credits. Dietitians may also complete an equivalent qualification that is accredited by the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET), and the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA), and recognised by the HPCSA. Dietitians should confine themselves to the performance of professional acts in the field of Dietetics in which they were educated and trained, and in which they have gained experience. The qualification entails the use of appropriate policies, programmes, and nutrition principles to diagnose, prevent, treat, manage, counsel, advocate, and educate about nutrition-related diseases and promote the wellbeing of the individual, groups, community and population.

PROFESSIONAL ATTRIBUTES OF A DIETITIAN

Dietitians need to possess scientific knowledge, critical thinking, problem solving and ethical decision-making skills to practise as independent professionals. They shall engage in continuing professional development (CPD) to keep abreast of developments in nutrition and new healthcare practices; as well as to ensure evidence-based practice by upholding their knowledge, insight and technical competence. In addition, Dietitians should have a sound knowledge of human anatomy, pathophysiology, medical terminology, patient care, community nutrition, food service management, therapeutic nutrition, nutrition research, food systems, nutrition education or behaviour change communication, nutritional anthropology, human rights, ethics, relevant law and policies.

PROFESSIONAL DUTIES OF A DIETITIAN

Dietitians are the nutrition experts in the multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary teams and settings and are involved in the provision of expert nutrition services. The provision of these services can take place in a variety of settings namely primary, secondary and tertiary levels of care, within public, private and research settings. Dietitians have evidence-informed and scientific knowledge of medical nutrition therapy, community nutrition and food service administration.

The scope of the profession is vast and encompasses the prevention, diagnosis, treatment and management of a range of nutritional disorders, acute and chronic conditions and lifestyle behaviour. Many individuals and communities receive nutritional advice and treatment as a vital element of their recovery and wellbeing.

SCOPE OF PRACTICE FOR DIETITIAN

The scope of practice should be read in conjunction with the current *Regulations defining the scope of profession for Dietitians* and must also be read in conjunction with the HPCSA Ethical Rules of Conduct for Practitioners registered under the Health Professions Act, 1974, as well as the relevant Board policies and guidelines.

The scope of practice is subject to having the requisite education, competence, and experience to perform activities in the field of:

(a) Community nutrition

Community nutrition is the process of helping individuals and groups develop healthy eating habits to promote wellness and prevent disease. Community nutrition encompasses individual and interpersonal-level interventions focused on creating changes in knowledge, attitudes, behaviour, and health outcomes either individually or in small groups within a community setting (American Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, 2014).¹

(b) Food Service Management

Food Service Management is the process of the strategic day-to-day management of the provision of safe, quality, healthy, balanced, appetising meals and beverages to clients, including meals for specialised diets according to therapeutic prescriptions. Food Service Management includes, among other things, menu planning, resource management (including human and financial resources), food service staff training, hygiene and safety of food production and provision and client satisfaction.²

(c) Therapeutic Nutrition

Therapeutic Nutrition is the process of using foods and nutrients to prevent and/or treat a diseases or condition. Medical Nutrition Therapy (MNT) is a therapeutic approach to treat medical conditions and their associated symptoms through the use of specifically tailored dietary intervention devised and monitored by registered dietitians. The diet is

¹ Professional Board for Dietetics and Nutrition. 2022. Registered Dietitian Nutritionist: Skills and Competencies.

² Payne-Palacio, J. & Theis, M. 2016. Food Service Management: Principles and Practices. 13th Ed. Boston, Prentice Hall.

based on the patient's medical record, physical examination, functional examination, and dietary history.³

(d) Nutrition Research

Nutrition Research is the process of conducting critical and exhaustive investigation or experimentation with the aim to prove or discover new facts and their correct interpretation. It conceptualises, formulates, implements, executes and communicates nutrition related research in accordance with or in the field of Food Service Management, Community Nutrition and Therapeutic Nutrition.⁴

The scope of practice provides an overview of the tasks that Dietitians are involved in. It must be adapted to their specific area of practice and level of responsibility using an integrated and life cycle approach. Dietitians optimise the nutritional well-being of clients, patients and or groups in different settings, as follows:

Community Nutrition:

- (a) Using evidence-based theory and practice of nutrition to address population-based nutrition-related challenges and their causes and determinants through appropriate policies and programmes.
- (b) Assessing, analysing, and interpreting the nutrition status of individuals, groups, communities, and populations using relevant methodologies (for example profiling, surveillance).
- (c) Planning, implementing, monitoring, evaluating and managing the appropriate policies and programmes to address population-based nutrition challenges and associated causes and determinants to achieve and maintain nutritional well-being.
- (d) Utilising a comprehensive body of knowledge and principles of nutritional sciences to advise on appropriate, safe food and nutrition in an ethically responsible manner to communities and population groups during the different stages of the life cycle of all individuals.
- (e) Applying effective strategic communication (including advocacy, social mobilisation and behaviour change strategies) to the advancement of the nutrition profession, services, and programmes.

³ Professional Board for Dietetics and Nutrition. 2022. Registered Dietitian Nutritionist: Skills and Competencies.

⁴ Van Horn, L & Beto, J. 2019. Research: Successful Approaches in Nutrition and Dietetics. 4th Ed. Chicago, Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics.

- (f) Applying information, communication, counselling, education skills and social mobilisation to empower communities and populations to change their food or nutrition behaviour to make safe, healthy food choices to prevent nutrition-related diseases and to promote quality of life.
- (g) Conceptualising, planning, implementing, monitoring, evaluating, and documenting appropriate nutrition policies, strategies, and guidelines.
- (h) Planning, implementing, managing, evaluating, monitoring, and documenting procedures and policies relating to human, financial, operational, and other resources for the nutrition well-being of individuals, groups, communities and populations.
- (i) Managing human, financial, and other resources to ensure optimal and equitable delivery of nutrition services at all levels of service delivery.
- (j) Applying critical and creative thinking in working effectively with nutrition-related issues of the community and stakeholders to contribute to the personal, social, and economic development of society in an ethical and professional manner.
- (k) Training and supervising dietetic and nutrition students, community service dietitians and dietitians in the process of registration *for example restoration, reinstatement and in possession of foreign qualification*.
- (l) Participate in peer reviews and nutrition service delivery audits.

Food Service Management

- (a) Planning and executing an effective food service system (food procurement, storage, production, distribution, and consumption of the final food product) based on the specific food and nutritional needs of the patients, clients and or groups in the community and in institutions.
- (b) Managing human, financial, and other resources to ensure optimal and equitable delivery of food and nutrition services at all levels of service delivery, for the nutrition well-being of patients, clients and or groups in the community and in institutions.
- (c) Implementing the production and management principles and practices of large-scale food production.
- (d) Applying principles, regulations, and legislations regarding food quality standards (food science, food safety, food handling) as well as procedures to monitor food standards with reference to nutritional, sensory, and microbiological aspects.
- (e) Developing, analysing, adapting, and updating normal and therapeutic menus to comply with patient/client and/or group needs and preferences.

- (f) Develop and compile a document on normal and therapeutic recipes for specific needs of patients, clients and or groups in the community and in institutions.
- (g) Monitoring, assessing and documenting patients, clients and/or groups' satisfaction with food service systems.
- (h) Applying critical and creative thinking in working effectively within a multidisciplinary environment contributing to the personal, social, and economic development of the society in an ethical and professional manner with a human rights perspective.
- (i) Training and supervising dietetic and nutrition students, community service dietitians and dietitians in the process of registration *for example restoration, reinstatement and in possession of foreign qualification*.
- (j) Participating in food safety and other related health and safety audits.

Therapeutic Nutrition

- (a) Using evidence-based theory and scientific nutrition knowledge to prevent, diagnose, treat, and manage nutrition related diseases in clients, patients and groups.
- (b) Utilising a comprehensive body of knowledge principles of nutritional sciences to counsel and advise on food, nutrition, and nutritional care in an ethical and responsible manner with clients and patients during the different stages of the life cycle of all individuals.
- (c) Consulting and treating of new and follow-up patients (inpatients and outpatients) which includes:
 - (i) Screening and assessing the nutritional status (anthropometric, body composition, biochemical, clinical, and dietary, socio-economic; medication interactions) and concomitant health risks of clients and patients using relevant methodologies; (in future there is need to additionally to review this document also and provide detail regarding these professional activities).
 - (ii) Analysing and interpreting the anthropometric and body composition results, biochemical results, clinical symptoms/ signs, and dietary history, using relevant methodologies to diagnose nutrition related conditions.
 - (iii) Calculating of nutritional requirements and developing of individualised nutrition intervention plans.
 - (iv) Communicating effectively to inform clients and patients on behavioural change using appropriate nutrition counselling methods or skills.
 - (v) Participating in multidisciplinary ward rounds by taking the lead in nutrition

- intervention such as prescription of appropriate nutrition, route, dose, frequency, and duration.
- (iv) Keeping appropriate patient records to enable proper patient management/care in a multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary settings and on individual consultation.
 - (vii) Monitoring of clients, patients and groups compliance and tolerance with nutrition care plan.
 - (viii) Referring of clients, patients and effectively communicating with members of the multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary team.
 - (ix) Compiling, analysing, and adapting normal and therapeutic menus to comply with nutritional needs and food preferences of patients, clients, and groups.
 - (x) Applying effective counselling techniques to change the clients, patients, and groups behaviour in nutrition.
 - (xi) Requesting and analysing nutritional related biochemical data to make medical nutrition diagnosis.
 - (xii) Dispensing of medical nutritional therapeutic supplements in line with application legislation or regulation.
- (d) Planning, implementing, managing, evaluating, monitoring, and documenting procedures and policies relating to human, financial, operational, and other resources for the nutrition well-being of clients and patients.
 - (e) Participate in nutrition policy development and record keeping and report writing.
 - (f) Managing human, financial, and other resources to ensure optimal and equitable delivery of nutrition services at all levels of service delivery.
 - (g) Conceptualising, formulating, implementing, executing and communicating nutrition related research in accordance with the ethical rules of conduct for dietitians registered under the Health Professions Act.
 - (h) Applying critical and creative thinking in working effectively within a multidisciplinary environment contributing to the personal, social, and economic development of the society in an ethical and professional manner within a human rights perspective.
 - (i) Advocating for the nutrition profession, services and programmes.
 - (j) Planning and participation in health awareness events, campaigns and open days.
 - (k) Training and supervising dietetic and nutrition students, community service dietitians and dietitians in the process of registration *for example restoration, reinstatement and in possession of foreign qualification.*
 - (l) Participate in peer reviews and clinical audits.

Nutrition Research

In addition to the scope of the profession as prescribed in the regulations, the following acts fall within the scope of practice for Dietitians working or practising in the field of Nutrition Research:

- (a) Assessing and applying relevant scientific information in order to identify research needs in the field of Nutrition and Dietetics.
- (b) Critically evaluating, integrating literature, including systematic review and meta-analysis, and composing a literature review on any nutrition related topic, using an evidence-based approach.
- (c) Conducting and reporting nutrition research process using quantitative and/or qualitative methodology in writing up a research report.
- (d) Translating the findings of a research report into appropriate and feasible recommendations such as, advising on the development of policies based on nutrition theory and research, designing, managing and evaluating measurements and intervention programmes.

The listing of activities and specific areas of practice within this Scope of Practice does not exclude emerging areas of practice in this dynamic and continuous developments in the profession.

ANNEXURE A

REGULATIONS DEFINING THE SCOPE OF THE PROFESSION OF DIETITIANS

The Minister of Health has, under section 33 (1) of the Health Professions Act, 1974 (Act No. 56 of 1974) and on the recommendation the Health Professions Council of South Africa, made the regulations in the Schedule.

SCHEDULE

1. The following acts are deemed to be acts pertaining to the scope of the profession of Dietitians:
 - (1) Optimizing the nutritional well-being of individuals and groups in different settings across the life cycle to improve overall health and well-being by:
 - (a) Using evidence-based theory and practice of nutrition to promote, prevent, treat, and manage nutrition related diseases.
 - (b) Utilizing a comprehensive body of knowledge of principles of nutritional sciences to advise on food, nutrition, and nutritional care in an ethical and responsible manner to individuals, communities, or population groups during the different stages of the life cycle.
 - (c) Advocating for, and leadership in, the nutrition profession, services, and programmes.
 - (d) Assessing the nutritional status, including but not limited to, anthropometric, biochemical, clinical, and dietary, socio-economic; medication interactions and concomitant health risks of clients or patients and groups using relevant methodologies.
 - (e) Conceptualizing, screening, nutrition related diagnosing, planning, prescribing, implementing, managing, evaluating, and documenting appropriate nutritional interventions for individual patients or clients with specific nutritional needs.
 - (f) Effectively communicating to inform and to change behaviour using appropriate counselling methods and other skills.
 - (g) Conceptualising, planning, implementing, monitoring, evaluating, and documenting appropriate intervention strategies to address nutrition and related health issues and diseases in groups, communities, and populations.
 - (h) Planning and executing and managing an effective food service system based on the specific food and nutritional needs of the healthy and the ill.
 - (i) Managing human, financial, and other resources to ensure optimal and equitable delivery of nutrition services at all levels of service delivery.

- (j) Conceptualizing, formulating, implementing, and communicating nutrition related research.
- (k) Planning, implementing, managing, monitoring, evaluating and documenting procedures, policies and strategies relating to human, financial, operational, and other resources.
- (l) Applying a collaborative and integrated approach in conjunction with critical and creative thinking within a multidisciplinary environment, contributing to improved personal health and well-being as well as social, and economic development of the society, in an ethical and professional manner within a human rights perspective.
- (m) Engaging individuals, families, communities, and key stakeholders within the community in the planning, designing, implementation and evaluation of nutrition interventions or programmes to improve access to, and utilization of nutrition services, to respond to population needs.

2. Repeal

The regulations defining the scope of the profession of dietetics as published under government notice R891 in *regulation gazette* 4684 of 26 April 1991 are hereby repealed and **replaced** with Government Notice **26** No. 50164 Government Gazette, 23 February 2024.

