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ANDID POSITION STATEMENT

DIETITIANS' PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE

The role of dietitians in food sustainability

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Background

The sustainability culture is “a culture based on the perspective of durable development, which can benefit all the present and future planet populations, in which social nature safeguards such as fight against poverty, human rights, and health are integrated with the need to preserve natural resources and ecosystems, and are mutually supportive of each other” ⁽¹⁾.

Talking about food sustainability means stimulating critical thinking, highlighting the concept of limit (physical limit and the optional limit of freedom of choice) related to the effects of our everyday actions, and promoting a sense of community and responsibility towards the world we live in ⁽²⁾.

From a food and nutritional point of view, we are facing problematic and interconnecting issues that require an increasing professional involvement. Population’s health, the expected scenarios and the trends from the near future represent the whole food system health’s mirror ⁽³⁾.

In the past decades, the changes occurred in the Western world agricultural policies, as well as those of technological, economic and social nature, led to deep changes in the global food system, with consequences on the lifestyles and on food consumption patterns, which scientific evidence has proved strongly related to the increase of the chronic degenerative diseases and the current obesity epidemic ⁽⁴⁾.

Moreover, those changes have caused relevant environmental effects due to the increase of organic and packaging waste, to the stress exerted on soil and water resources and to the energy consumption induced by increasingly complex and articulated industrial processes.

Talking about sustainability for dietitians means thus considering all the sectors that constitute the food system (the process of production, processing, distribution, access, consumption, waste production and management), while comparatively assessing their effects according four main points: human health, environment, society and economy.

The Community’s well-being should indeed be considered as the center of all the policies and the social and economic strategies. According to this point of view, food sustainability is strongly related to the assurance of inalienable conditions such as ethics and equity in the control and the use of natural resources, social justice, poverty reduction, food security and respect for the environment, within and between countries.

An ecological approach to food allows to meet the needs of the present generation without compromising those of the future ones and takes form in a sustainable food system, that provides “good” food not only as a nourishment, but also as a link between food production and the protection of bio-diversity, safeguarding the ecosystem’s integrity.

Defining sustainability within the context of nutrition and dietetics, Gussow and Clancy recommend “...consumers need to make food choices that not only maintain and/or enhance their own health but also contribute to the protection of natural resources” (5).

With this position paper, ANDID aims to empower dietitians, the public health world, the food companies, the policy makers and the citizens on food sustainability. The individual and collective aspects of choosing and consuming food affect and reflect in fact our relationship with the otherness (nature, the other individual, other consumption cultures, the need of survival) while significantly influencing the ecosystem and geo-social stability (6).

The value of the individual and the collective actions in food sustainability can be clarified just referring to the concept of responsibility. The etymology of this word (from the Latin *spondeo* “I give you my word” and *respondeo* “I answer to a commitment”) clearly expresses the idea of “responding of something to someone”, that is the commitment to consider the consequences of our actions in terms of effects on the others as well as ourselves.

The pursuit of sustainable food security, that proceeds not only through a careful natural resources management plan, but also through the reassessment of the production, distribution and consumption models, thus becomes the responsibility of all and primarily of dietitians, who can be a qualified and significant reference for the implementation of a food system that is directed to the protection of health and overall social welfare, by covering different roles in the food chain range, and carrying out their activity in different professional areas(7).

Position

It is the position of the Italian Association of Dietitians that all Dietitians have to encourage sustainability-responsible practices.

Dietitians have to:

- Consider the health needs of the population within a global food system, promoting consumption that supports sustainable agriculture, biodiversity and natural resources preservation, minimize waste and promotes environmental sustainability
- Collaborate actively with other health care professionals, government agencies, public or private institutions and Civil Society Organizations in the implementation of theoretical models linking natural resources, food production and global health
- Posses experience and have followed specific training and continuous education in the field of food sustainability
- Constantly evaluate the effectiveness of their professional service

ANDID hopes for dietitians to be more represented and involved in committees and local, national and international authorities, in order to promote and support policies that encourage development of sustainable food models.

Central position of the population

By applying the principles of evidence-based public health, dietitians use their own professional judgment with the aim of adapting the best evidence supplied by research to the regarded situations and to the community values(8) (9) (10).

The role of the dietitian

Dietitians take part in intervention design and planning to put into action a sustainable food system, on which it is essential to support and enforce participatory paths, made up of ideas,

agreements, actions, collaborations and partnerships centered on responsibility and shared values, in collaboration with other health care professionals, government agencies, public or private institutions and Civil Society Organizations.

In addition to being an expert in the assessment of dietary habits, dietary intake and nutritional status of a community, the dietitian takes part in the formulation of the epidemiological and social diagnosis needed to develop, carry out and/or implement sustainable food policies. The effectiveness and the impact of these actions must be evaluated in advance ⁽¹¹⁾.

ANDID believes that the ability to properly combine the biological, sociological, cultural and environmental aspects of the dietary style of a specific population is the key ability of a dietitian.

Dietitians constantly document their professional activity, interact with Food Industry, Community Food Services, Mass media, cooperate with government agencies (Minister of Health, Minister of Agriculture, Regional Health Agencies, Municipal and Provincial Administrations), Universities, Local Health Services (Food Hygiene and Nutrition Services, Local districts), public or private institutions and Civil Society Organizations to promote sustainable food policies.

The specific contribution of the dietitian, both independently and in collaboration with other professionals, includes:

Individual and community nutrition

Dietitians who work in public health, clinical setting or in private practice, have to provide their patients/clients/customers with useful information (food production system, marketing, consumption, waste disposal, price/cost ratio etc.) to support the adoption of a sustainable food style, by ⁽¹²⁾:

- Promoting variety of the diet
- Promoting sobriety in food purchases
- Promoting the purchase and the consumption of plant-based foods
- Promoting the purchase and the consumption of seasonal foods
- Promoting the purchase and the consumption of locally produced food
- Promoting the purchase and the consumption of fresh or minimally processed foods
- Promoting the consumption of fish products certified for sustainable fishery
- Promoting the purchase and the consumption of certified and/or low environmental and social impact food
- Promoting the consumption of tap water
- Promoting the purchase of food with less packaging or with recycled packaging material
- Promoting the purchase of eco-labeled food

Foodservices and food industries

Foodservices (companies, schools, social health, commercial), for their territorial extension and the number of meals provided, and food industries represent strategic sectors in which dietitians can support the introduction of sustainability criteria (food characteristics, purchasing procedures, energy consumption, water consumption, system of transportation, use of chemicals, waste production and management, staff management).

ANDID hopes that dietitians commit themselves into promoting intervention programs for the recovery and the redistribution of food surplus, no longer marketable but still suitable for consumption, to help people and families in condition of social vulnerability, according to the current legislation.

Food policies

ANDID hopes that dietitians involved in committees and local, national and international authorities will strive for supporting an environment able to increase the consistency of policies that can link health and agriculture, environment, trade, education, employment and social policies, according to the specificities of the areas and the community health needs.

Evaluation of service effectiveness

Dietitians evaluate the quality of their professional activity by constantly reviewing their results and comparing them to defined and shared professional standards. To this aim, they share with the working group all data and information concerning their implemented actions. The keeping of records concerning activities and results is an integral part of the professional practice of the dietitian.

Training and continuing education

ANDID aims for the basic university training to ensure theoretical/practical background on food sustainability.

Practical traineeship should be carried out in the Food Hygiene and Nutrition Services and in Education and Health Promotion Services of the National Health System under the supervision of an expert Dietitian.

ANDID aims for a post-graduate internship (at least 6 months duration) to be carried out in Universities Departments of Public Health and in Food Hygiene and Nutrition Services. It is moreover desirable to attend a post-graduate course in Public Health and Food and Nutrition Policies. ANDID wishes that at least 50% of CME credits is obtained from events related to food sustainability and health promotion, and that most of the remaining 50% from ethical and professional events, related to the professional activity of the Dietitian.

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