



**EXPLORING
CAREERS
IN
dietetics
and
nutrition**

**BY
JUNE KOZAK KANE, MS, RD**

EXPLORING CAREERS IN DIETETICS and NUTRITION

by

June Kozak Kane, MS, RD



THE ROSEN PUBLISHING GROUP, INC.
New York

Published in 1987 by Rosen Publishing Group, Inc.
29 East 21st Street, New York, NY 10010

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First Edition

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

June Kozak Kane.

Exploring careers in dietetics and nutrition.

(Careers in depth)

Bibliography: p.

Includes index.

1. Dietetics—Vocational guidance. 2. Nutrition—
Vocational guidance. I. Title. II. Series.

RM218.5.K36 1987 613.2'023 86-20333

ISBN 0-8239-0658-2

Manufactured in the United States of America

Cover photo by James Nickel

This book is dedicated to Dr. Orrea F. Pye of the program in Nutrition, Teachers College, Columbia University, for her ever-fresh and open-minded attitude toward nutrition research and her students, and to Dr. Joan Gussow who continued that tradition.

It is also dedicated to Dr. Maurice Shils of Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center and Dr. Hector DeLuca of the University of Wisconsin Biochemistry Department, for the excellence of their professional example.

And I thank my parents and my husband and children for their patience.

About the Author

June Kozak Kane is a Registered Dietitian with a Master of Science in Nutrition/Education from Columbia University. She is President of The Well-Centered Cantaloupe, a nutrition and education consulting firm in Providence, Rhode Island.

For five years before her family's relocation to Providence, Ms. Kane was Chief Nutritionist for the City of Milwaukee Health Department. In that capacity she supervised nutrition programs in several city clinics, including a WIC program with a monthly client census of over 5,000 and the nutritional component of a citywide wellness and prevention program. She also served as Clinical Assistant Professor at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee School of Nursing and as President of the Milwaukee Community Nutrition Council. A frequent guest on radio and television, Ms. Kane is a popular lecturer, giving over 150 lectures each year.

Before her Milwaukee assignments, Ms. Kane was instructor and curriculum development specialist for the Dietetic Technology Program of the City Colleges of Chicago. Earlier she had served as a nutrition coordinator for the 1976 summer season aboard The Floating Hospital, a medical ship that offers health education and medical screening to needy persons in New York, and as Rehabilitation Dietitian at the Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center in New York.

Ms. Kane and her husband, Daniel A. Kane, a hospital executive, are the parents of two children, Joshua Alexander Kane and Seth Andrew Kane.



Foreword

When you are trying to decide on the right career, there are so many factors to consider: the educational requirements (a major consideration for any profession!) and whether you will be able to handle them; the satisfactions, challenges, and drawbacks that a particular career might hold; future employment opportunities; whether the field is personally interesting and even exciting; and whether it will require just those character traits and talents that you happen to possess or can develop.

If you now have an interest in nutrition, people, and how the body works, the study of dietetics may offer you the perfect starting point for a career. Once the basic requirements are met, you can choose to specialize in an area that combines your own special talents and interests. You can even move to an entirely different specialty sometime down the career road, to utilize new skills and interests developed along the way. Depending on which professional emphasis you choose, a career in dietetics and nutrition can utilize an ability to speak before a television, radio, or live audience; or it can capitalize on a mastery of biochemistry and physiology, the ability to handle statistics and research techniques, the expertise to run a multimillion-dollar institutional food service, or the ability to work with rich or poor, young or old, sick or well, colleague or layperson, native or foreigner.

As you read this book, you will discover a profession that might become a lifelong passion and offer you just what you are seeking in a career. Because of the incredible diversity of fields within nutrition and dietetics, it is possible to choose an area offering just the focus you want—a major amount of clinical emphasis, lots of patient contact, a teamwork approach, a career oriented toward research or writing, a public health or corporate setting. You may

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even combine an interest in nutrition with your special expertise in computers or an interest in track and field or cooking or medicine to come up with your own unique area of expertise.

Also in this career you will find a vast professional network offering you opportunities to interface with every major area of life, from industry to wellness programs, from maternal and infant populations to the elderly, from immigrants to corporate executives, from institutional food services to cancer research, and from sports to space. Whichever area you choose, any and all of the many specialty groups of the American Dietetic Association will welcome your enthusiasm, energy, and interest. Truly, in every area of this field, the career in dietetics and nutrition can offer you the respect of colleagues, clients, and your community.

We wish you good luck in the choice of a career. We think you've already made one wise decision in deciding to look into the information within this book. We hope you find what you are looking for.

Anita L. Owen, MA, RD

President, The American Dietetic Association, 1985-1986

Introduction

In a hospital intensive care unit, a young woman plans an intravenous feeding program that will help save the life of a burn victim. In a private clinic, a health-care specialist instructs a diabetic patient in the dietary control of his disease. On Capitol Hill, the director of a multimillion-dollar school food program testifies before a congressional committee on proposed changes in school lunch regulations. In a university laboratory, a researcher studies the relationship between a high-fat, low-fiber diet and colon cancer.

All of these people have one thing in common: They are professional dietitians with special training in nutritional health care. Increasingly, dietitians are being recognized as a vital link between the science of nutrition and its practical application, both in medicine and for the general population.

Historically, of course, the dietitian has often been called upon for special services in crisis situations: During the two World Wars, for example, nearly three fourths of all members of the American Dietetic Association were involved in the armed forces or Red Cross war efforts. In Korea and Vietnam they also did yeoman service. During the depression of the 1930's, dietitians helped organize relief feeding programs and also taught low-income groups how to plan a nutritionally adequate diet on a minimal budget.

The profession of dietetics has grown considerably since it was founded in 1917. The American Dietetic Association, the official organization of the profession, now has over 51,000 members working in a wide variety of settings. But the basic goals of the dietitian have remained the same over the past sixty years: to improve the nutrition of human beings and to advance the science

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of dietetics and nutrition by promoting education and research in these and allied areas.

Today's dietitian may be a university professor who teaches nutrition to nurses, physicians, or undergraduates. Others in the field may be consultants for restaurant or supermarket chains, and many work as researchers or in public health programs. Others may work in industry with giant food or pharmaceutical corporations.

To qualify for full professional membership in the ADA, the aspiring dietitian must complete at least four years of study in the biological and behavioral sciences and study food management systems, foods, and food sciences at an accredited college or university. Some schools offer undergraduate students an opportunity to work directly with patients, while others serve in graduate internships or special work-experience programs in dietetics. After passing a comprehensive qualifying exam, the applicant receives registration in dietetics. Other membership categories include those for students and for those completing the two-year degree programs at schools offering the associate degree in dietetic technology. The "diet tech" (DT) is professionally qualified to assist the registered dietitian (RD) in clinical dietetics or food service management, depending on the specialty chosen.

Currently, an increasing percentage of dietitians go on to earn master's and doctoral degrees in nutrition or related fields, and some go on to medical school or nursing. No matter what nutrition-related career is selected, the dietitian's training emphasizes a special understanding of the relationship of food to nutrition and health and of the economic, social, and cultural factors that influence individual eating habits.

Although dietitians today have a wide variety of career possibilities, most work in hospitals. In fact, dietetics is often a hospital's second largest department, led only by nursing. For example, a 900-bed hospital may require a dietetics department of 200 employees and have a yearly budget of several million dollars.

Most hospital dietitians are directly involved in some aspect of patient care. The therapeutic dietitian, for instance, has a background in the biochemistry and pathology of nutrition and special dietary problems. These dietitians often work with patients having inherited metabolic disorders or nutrition-related diseases such as diabetes, high blood lipids (fats), and hypertension. People with eating disorders and those who suffer from cancer also may

receive advice from the dietitian. Dietitians may help devise therapeutic diets during a patient's hospitalization and counsel patients in the long-term use of special diets. They may also instruct student nurses and dietetic interns (and in many hospitals, medical students) in the nutritional aspects of patient care.

Other dietitians may work in outpatient clinics, where they guide patients in maintaining dietary regimens and also teach them to plan menus, prepare foods, and even stay within a food budget while on a prescribed diet. Physicians often refer patients to these clinic dietitians for help with special nutritional problems such as obesity, pregnancy, infant feeding, and dietary problems caused by disability or life stages, habits, and conditions.

As noted earlier, many dietitians are also educators in universities and professional schools. Still others may be involved in community nutrition education, teaching health educators and social workers and the public or acting as consultants to various community, government, or even international feeding programs.

In this book you'll discover more about all of these different areas of dietetics as well as dietitians in sports nutrition and exciting entrepreneurial activities.

Whenever young people—and older ones as well—ask us about careers in nutrition, we recommend that they consider dietetics as a possibility. It is an expanding profession that offers men and women many challenging opportunities to serve their fellow citizens, both in this country and throughout the world.

—Dr. Jean Mayer and Dr. Johanna Dwyer

DR. JEAN MAYER is the President of Tufts University. He holds several doctoral degrees and has a long and distinguished record of research and educational activities. For 26 years he was Professor of Nutrition at Harvard University. His informative and well-researched columns on nutrition are syndicated in newspapers across the country. Dr. Mayer serves on many professional boards and has given his support to nutrition education and research activities nationally and internationally.

DR. JOHANNA DWYER, DSc, RD, is Professor of Medicine (Nutrition) and Community Health at Tufts Medical School. She is also Director of the Frances Stern Nutrition Center and Dietetic Internship of the New England Medical Center Hospitals. Her background includes a vast array of research and applied nutrition

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projects in the United States and abroad. She is a former President of the Society for Nutrition Education. For several years, she co-authored with Dr. Mayer their very popular syndicated nutrition column.

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A Word About Career Guidance

Planning and dreaming of your future career can be both exciting and overwhelming. You're very lucky—and very unusual—if you know just what you want to be and are reading this book only to discover more details about the field you have chosen. More probably, you are interested in diets, or hospitals or medicine, or science, or the marketing of special foods, and you're thinking that maybe dietetics or nutrition or food service might be interesting and might offer what you want.

Or maybe you have no idea at all about the areas of nutrition, dietetics, and food service—you're just curious. Well, you are about to read about a field so dynamic that you will probably find several career possibilities. Whether you want a job that is peaceful or hectic, whether you want to work one-on-one or with a staff of fifty, whether you want a desk job or a foreign service field assignment, whether you want a job that is glamorous or will let you work quietly with test animals or test tubes—all these career possibilities exist in nutrition and dietetics. The only thing most of the job offerings have in common is that they offer you a chance to serve humanity.

Of course, what will determine your choice of career will be your own special talents plus your individual character traits and needs, likes and dislikes. We shall suggest what talents and traits might be best suited to each area discussed. But you might want to take a moment right now and ask yourself what you enjoy doing, how hard you like to work, and what you want of a career: Is it job security? excitement? helping people? making a difference in the world? finding a career that might allow you to work in your home or part time while you raise a family? working in a hospital? not

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working in a hospital? working in industry? teaching at the college level? writing or doing research? Or maybe you'd like a bit of all of those in one career?

Reading this book, you'll have the chance to match your special interests to the varied careers in the field of dietetics. That's why you might want to take time now to think about whether you like to work alone or in a group, with sick people or well people, for personal satisfaction or monetary gain, or both. Do you think you'd like your own radio or television spot, or a newspaper column? Do you want to be a known expert in your community? Do you want to work directly with food, or more indirectly such as with nutrient calculations, advertising, or menu planning? It might help you if you could answer at least some of these questions, even if you change your mind somewhat after trying out some of the career areas. It might also help just to keep the questions in the back of your mind; if you don't have a ready answer now, perhaps some of the answers will come to you in time.

Many guidance techniques are available that can help you sort out some of these questions. Your school counselor or a career-counseling agency can provide several tests to help you identify your employment needs. One test, the Strong-Campbell Interest Inventory, can help you see clearly how you feel about a number of work-related areas: whether you should work for a large corporation or whether you can make it on your own and would prefer that; whether you enjoy the security of routine work or whether you really need constantly changing tasks; whether you enjoy a more or a less competitive environment. The test may help you zero in on areas that you might not think to ask yourself.

To help you begin to think about these matters, we have put together a list of questions that you may wish to ask yourself right now. Your answers should help to point you in some very specific career directions.

As you read each of these questions, note whether the character trait definitely applies to you, does not apply to you, or is one that you think you could develop.

1. Do you have a deep desire to help people or to help improve the human condition?

(These "nurturing" and "activist" qualities can be a definite asset in many areas of community and public health nutrition, as well as in clinical nutrition counseling.)

2. Do you maintain your own health and good eating habits?
(This is good for your credibility in the field of dietetics, and especially if you are in a job where you'll act as a role model, such as in diet counseling. But don't worry if you've been overweight or bulimic and have overcome those difficulties; the understanding that you gain from your own experiences will help you gain credibility with others and perhaps help them even more.)
3. Are you tactful and discreet? Can you keep other people's secrets?
(In diet counseling or clinical dietetics or food service management, you are privy to the most personal aspects of your clients' or staff's lives. All this is privileged information and should never be repeated except for professional purposes.)
4. Are you dependable?
5. Are you responsible and conscientious?
(The amount of supervisory responsibility that you feel comfortable with may determine whether you'll enjoy a management or staff position, but in dietetics you'll always need to be responsible for keeping up to date with professional literature and presenting accurate information to clients.)
6. Do you have a real interest in food, health, and medical care?
(Even if you don't work directly with them, the legislation and professional research and practices in these areas will still affect you in almost any area of the dietetics profession.)
7. Do you have intellectual curiosity? Are you interested in the scientific reasons for things?
(If you lack these qualities, you might be in danger of practicing your profession by rote, which can allow life-threatening errors to creep into your work. Intellectual curiosity will also help keep your interest in your work alive.)
8. Can you maintain your equanimity even when things are going wrong?
(Frustrations with grant applications, staff foul-ups, absenteeism, or mechanical difficulties can occur whether you are a staff dietitian, a food service manager, a nutrition