Medical Nutrition & the Registered Dietitian Nutritionist
An Integral Part of Patient Care

Medical Nutrition Therapy (MNT) has been shown to be effective in wellness, disease prevention, and disease management. MNT improves health and quality of life for individuals with disease conditions can reduce hospitalization, prescription drug use, and "illness” visits with their physician.

Evidenced based nutrition practice guidelines have proven the value of MNT when Registered Dietitian Nutritionists (RDNs) provide the services. Education, experience and on-going education requirements make the RDN the preferred professional to provide MNT.

RDN Participation in the Patient Centered Medical Home (PCMH)

The PCMH emphasizes disease prevention and management of comorbidities. Multiple studies have shown that MNT provided by an RDN improves health outcomes related to chronic diseases, such as type 2 diabetes, blood lipid disorders, obesity and hypertension.

Registered Dietitian Nutritionists are the only licensed nutrition professional in Idaho. RDN’s are an ideal part of a team providing cost-effective patient centered care to individuals through the PCMH. Dietitians are trained to provide MNT through a nutrition centered care plan. A nutrition centered care plan focuses on the assessment, nutrition diagnosis, treatment plan, evaluation and monitoring of an individual’s progress.

*In addition:*

- Primary care physicians see the benefit of RDNs as part of their health care team.
  - Studies have shown that physicians believe that nutrition is important for the care of their patients.
  - Surveys report physicians feel inadequately trained to provide optimal nutrition counseling.

- RDNs have unique skills related to assessment and multidisciplinary team approach, essential elements of a PCMH.

- RDNs are trained to work with interdisciplinary teams provide evidence-based, patient-centered care and promote effective patient self-manage.

- RDNs demonstrate strong management skills and are well-positioned to work as case/care managers in the PCMH.

Primary care providers will be expected to incorporate “5 functions” of primary care. Each of the 5 functions present a role for RDN support.

- Care management:
  - Care managers will have a central role in each primary care practice.
  - A care manager will be expected to collaboratively assess, plan, facilitate, and evaluate patient’s health care and psychosocial needs to promote quality and cost-effective outcomes.
• RDNs are uniquely trained and qualified to perform care management, particularly for patients with complex health needs.
• RDNs have shown efficacy for working with patients with multiple chronic diseases.

• Enhanced access:
• RDNs assist practices with enhanced patient access
• RDNs offer care management services via telephone, email, or other asynchronous methods.

• Planned care for chronic conditions and preventive care:
• RDNs have strong skills sets for providing care for prevention of nutrition-related diseases and conditions
• RDNs also have strong skill sets for providing care for reduction of complications in chronic disease management

• Patient engagement and proactive patient planning:
• RDNs are trained to engage patients in their care, develop shared care plans, and proactively plan patients' care.
• The nutrition care process requires monitoring patient progress and outcomes.

• Care coordination across the medical neighborhood:
• RDNs are skilled in team-based care
• RDNs are trained to work with health care providers across all disciplines.

The RDN as the MNT Provider in the Patient Centered Medical Home

Primary care settings ideally incorporate Medical Nutrition Therapy by a licensed, registered dietitian in the patient centered medical home in the following ways:

• In the Clinic
  o Primary care settings benefit from registered dietitian nutritionists on site at their clinic.
  o As a cost-effective professional with nutrition expertise, RDNs can provide MNT to individuals or groups of patients as needed.
  o RDNs have the ability to develop wellness programs, create up-to-date materials for patient education, and monitor and track patient data (weight, BMI - body mass index, and labs).

• Outpatient Referrals
  o Primary care physicians develop a working relationship with independent RDN consultants and local hospital outpatient RDNs so that referrals may be made as needed.
  o RDNs report back to referring physician, maintain open communication and promote continuity of care.

• At the Patient’s Convenience
  o RDNs interact with patients over the phone and secure internet connections.
  o RDNs offer on-line consulting, educational services coaching and monitoring as an alternative to face-to-face meetings.

The Institute of Medicine (IOM) identifies RDN professionals as the single, identifiable group of health-care professionals with standardized education, clinical training, continuing education and national credentialing requirements necessary to provide and to be directly reimbursed as a provider of nutrition therapy.
There are many roles the RDN is ideally suited for in the patient centered medical home model. RDNs play a vital role in the health and wellness of patients and should be essential to patients served by the PCHM model.

**Registered Dietitians Improve Health Outcomes**

Health outcomes are improved by medical nutrition therapy (MNT) provided by a registered dietitian within Patient Centered Medical Homes. According to the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics’, the following benefits have been documented:

- **Overweight/obesity**
  - MNT provided to overweight and obese adults for less than six months yielded significant weight losses of approximately one to two pounds per week.
  - MNT provided from six to twelve months yielded significant weight loss of up to 10% of body weight with maintenance of this weight loss beyond one year.

- **Diabetes control**
  - MNT provided for three to six months by a registered dietitian reported reductions in A1C ranging from 0.25% to 2.9%.
  - Multiple studies of diabetes MNT showed sustained improvements in A1C at twelve months and longer.\(^1\)

- **Blood pressure control**
  - MNT provided by a registered dietitian aids in lowering blood pressure in adults with hypertension.
  - Studies show that MNT provided for less than six months leads to significant reductions (~5 mmHg) in both systolic and diastolic blood pressure.
  - MNT provided from six to twelve months reported similar significant reductions in blood pressure with sustained reductions in blood pressure beyond one year.

**References**


2. Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services Center for Medicare and Medicaid Innovation. *Comprehensive Primary Care Initiative Fact Sheet*.

