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’More students are enrolling for nutrition and dietetics courses’

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By **Guest** | April 13, 2015



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Indian Dietetic Association

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What kind of role IDA will play in shaping dietitians?

IDA is a platform where dietitians can exchange views, scientific updates and also network. IDA will continue to remain as the professional platform for exchange of scientific information as well as network for dietitians. IDA will also attempt to train younger dietitians to be not only good in their scientific knowledge, but also be good communicators, and counsellors. IDA will work towards improving the profession as the years go by. This is my thinking. And hopefully will be the agenda during my tenure.

Do you see a mismatch as regards supply and demand of dieticians in the country?

Absolutely. There is definitely demand for dietitians in many areas. Over a period time the number of colleges offering courses in nutrition and dietetics have increased. There are more number of students enrolling for these courses. Yet, we don’t have enough dietitians to take care of 1.2 billion population.

Is it possible to guess roughly as to how many more dietitians are required?

In IDA itself we have more than 10,000 members. So, altogether there might be more than 1,00,000 dietitians in the country. If that number of dietitians are available for 1.2 billion population, I think we are short by perhaps a 1000%. I am not sure of the exact numbers but the fact is we are short by a huge margin considering the population.

Is there any internationally accepted ratio of population to dietitians?

There is no ideal ratio across all countries. The ratio is different in each country. Just to give you an example, Japan’s dietetic association has membership of more than 50,000 and the population of the country is 126 million, much less than one-tenth of ours. They have much better ratio in their country. American Dietetic Association has almost 80,000 members and the US population is 319 million.So, in every country the ratio is different. We have not really come

up with an ideal ratio in our country. But, there is a huge difference and I know for sure that we could much better in India through the Indian Dietetic Association.

What are the career and growth prospects for Registered Dietitians? Are new areas opening up?

Traditionally we worked mostly in hospitals, in academic area and research. These were the main areas in which dietitians worked about 30 years ago. But, today we have many more options. Catering companies are hiring dietitians, restaurants and hotels are consulting dietitians, gyms and fitness centres have dietitians, sports people are taking consultations from dietitians. Nutraceutical and biotechnology companies are employing dietitians. The avenues are getting wider and broader for qualified dietitians and nutritionists. Dietitians are also turning to be entrepreneurs, which is a nice thing. Sky is the limit for dietitians and nutritionists because everybody on the planet needs to eat food and everybody needs to be healthy. As long as those two priorities are present there will always be scope for dietitians and nutritionists.

In which way dietitians and nutritionists can contribute to nutraceutical companies?

Suppose a company is targeting people with hypertension a dietician can help to develop a product that meets the requirements of such patients. And once the product is developed, the dietitian can talk to the peer group and the patients, about the science behind the product. The dietitian can be a part of the research team as well. In multiple ways a dietitian can give professional support for nutra companies.

Do you feel the courses offered at national level institutes on nutrition are fine and fulfil the requirement of society?

An academic person will be able to answer that question better. But, I think by and large most of the leading colleges offering nutrition and dietetics courses are pretty up-to-date with the subjects. Unfortunately there are some random courses that have come up and I don’t know really if they are recognised by the government or any university. There are certificate or online

courses too which may not be recognised. There are many people who take up such courses but are not fully qualified to work as a dietitian or a nutritionist. Such persons start working as consultants. I don't think such courses should be encouraged. Also the public needs to ensure that he/she consults a qualified dietitian or nutritionist. After all it's an individual's health we're talking about.

What are your plans to bring awareness among public on nutritional aspects?

More outreach programmes. We already have basic guidelines for the public on nutrition, how to eat right, what foods to choose, etc. These days eating out has become a popular activity. Perhaps to tell the people what foods to choose when they eat out. We can't have people not eat out. It is a lifestyle now. Also, the public is confused about many aspects of eating healthy and obtaining adequate nutrition. Busting myths and delivering scientific facts on nutrition from IDA will also help the public. So community outreach programmes are definitely going to be on the agenda.

FSSAI has made it mandatory for all FBOs, even roadside eateries, to register and this can happen effectively when people start choosing only registered FBO for food consumption. Has IDA any plans to create awareness among the people on this issue? Perhaps in the long run. I don't think it will happen in a short period. The idea is great and it is a possibility though we have not thought on those lines yet. It could happen in future. So, it's basically creating awareness on how to look for nutritional values of food served and other issues like cleanliness and hygiene etc in restaurants and roadside eateries. It is possible.

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