



COLLEGE OF DIETITIANS  
OF ALBERTA

## **College of Dietitians of Alberta Dysphagia Best Practice Guidelines: Addendum to the College of Dietitians of Ontario's Dysphagia Policy**

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### **Background:**

Dietitians in Alberta practice in the area of dysphagia assessment and management and have requested support to continue practice and/or to move into this as a new area of practice. The College of Dietitians of Alberta (the College) endorses the College of Dietitians of Ontario's (CDO) Dysphagia Policy, however as legislation is provincially determined, the College has created this addendum to the CDO Policy outlining Alberta legislation under the *Health Professions Act* to assist members in Alberta in understanding relevant legislation, relevant aspects of the *Code of Ethics*, relevant restricted activities and practice in Alberta.

### **Scope of Practice:**

The professional services that are provided by Registered Dietitians and Registered Nutritionists in their practice are reflected in their practice statement, as defined in the *Health Professions Act* (Schedule 23).

"in their practice Registered Dietitians and Registered Nutritionists do one or more of the following:

- (a) assess nutritional status and develop, implement, and evaluate food and nutrition strategies and interventions to promote health and treat illness."

Dysphagia assessment and management is captured under this point in the practice statement because dysphagia is a disorder that impacts nutritional status, and management relies on nutrition-related strategies and interventions. Dysphagia screening, assessment, treatment and management have been designated as falling within the scope of practice of dietitians in Ontario, and likewise fall within the practice statement for dietitians (RD) in Alberta.

To further define the role of the dietitian in dysphagia management, the College has modified CDO's scope of practice statement as follows:

1. Dysphagia is a disorder that impacts nutritional status and, therefore, aspects of dysphagia screening, assessment, treatment and management are within the scope of practice of RDs in Alberta.
2. The College of Dietitians of Alberta supports the skills and knowledge (competencies) identified by the *Dietitians of Canada Dysphagia Assessment and Treatment Network* as necessary to screen, assess, treat and manage dysphagia as a nutrition related condition.
3. A Registered Dietitian has an important role in a dysphagia team. This role is defined by the needs of the patient and the environment in which care is provided.

Assessment, development, implementation and evaluation of food and nutrition strategies and interventions, are well within the RD scope of practice. Bedside dysphagia assessment and treatment is not a restricted activity under Alberta legislation and therefore if an RD has the education, training and competence to perform the activity, the College supports this practice.

In addition, and of significance to members, Schedule 7.1 of the *Government Organizations Act (GOA)* states:

“2(1) The following carried out in relation to or as part of providing a health service, are restricted activities:

(j) to prescribe or administer diagnostic imaging contrast agents;”

This restricted activity as stated in the *GOA* (Government of Alberta, 2000) is applicable to dietetic practice as described in Section 10(1) of the *Registered Dietitian and Registered Nutritionist Profession Regulation* (Government of Alberta, 2000) which states that those Registered Dietitians who are authorized may perform the following restricted activity:

“(e) to prescribe and administer oral diagnostic imaging contrast agents if in the provision of medical nutrition therapy a regulated members performs a videofluoroscopic swallowing study or assists in the study;”

Registered Dietitians are performing this restricted activity when they determine the amount of barium contrast agent a client receives and/or administer the contrast agent, by way of mouth, during a videofluoroscopic swallowing study while providing medical nutrition therapy. The required competence indicators for performance of this restricted activity are summarized in Appendix 4 of the *Professional Practice Handbook for Dietitians in Alberta* (College of Dietitians of Alberta, 2007).

The College also understands that dysphagia management as part of the interprofessional health care team is supported by Alberta Health Services as noted in their 2013 competency document (Alberta Health Services, 2013).

### **Professional Conduct:**

According to the College of Dietitians of Alberta's *Code of Ethics* (College of Dietitians of Alberta, 2007),

4.0 The dietitian maintains competence in dietetic practice.

#### 4.1 Personal Competence

(3) the dietitian acquires new skills and knowledge on a continuing basis to ensure safe, competent, and ethical dietetic practice.

(4) The dietitian practices dietetics based on scientific principles and current evidence-based practice

(5) The dietitian practices within the scope of practice, the limits of their qualifications and their own level of competence

(6) The dietitian consults or makes referrals as appropriate when a situation is beyond their level of competence.

(7) The dietitian accepts only those responsibilities which they are competent to perform. If the dietitian is asked to assume responsibilities beyond their present level of competence, the dietitian acquires additional information, knowledge or skills prior to assuming the responsibilities or declines to accept them.

and

#### 4.2 Restricted Activities

(1) The dietitian performs restricted activities that are regulated by the College only when authorized to do so by the College.

(3) The dietitian assumes responsibility for the ongoing competence to perform restricted activities and seeks additional knowledge and skills to maintain current competent practice as required.

Registered Dietitians wishing to perform any task or function related to dysphagia have a duty to assess and evaluate whether they are competent to do so safely and effectively both from the professional and public protection points of view. Practice that is in contravention of the *Code of Ethics* (2007) may be considered unprofessional conduct. According to the CDO's dysphagia policy (2007), the assessment and evaluation of clients and patients with dysphagia should include a review of:

- the dietitian's knowledge, skills and attitudes to work in the area of dysphagia, including the requirement for authorization from the College to perform restricted activities, if applicable,
- the needs of the client,
- the environmental factors in which care is provided, such as presence or absence of other skilled professionals working in this area, and

- the organizational supports, such as employer's appreciation of workload implications and investment in training for practice in dysphagia.

**Competence:**

The College supports the skills and knowledge (the competencies) identified by the Dietitians of Canada Dysphagia Assessment and Treatment Network (Dietitians of Canada, 2005) as necessary to screen, assess, treat and manage dysphagia as a nutrition related condition impacting nutritional status. The College also supports the general interprofessional competencies identified by Alberta Health Services (2013).

The College of Dietitians of Ontario's policy document outlines the role of the RD as part of the interprofessional dysphagia management team, provides a glossary of terms and offers various references for members' support.

Please refer to these documents for competencies and related references / resources.

**Recommendations:**

The College recommends that dietitians interested in practicing in the area of dysphagia assessment and management take steps to ensure competence prior to practicing in the area, including continuing competence activities such as: reading the literature, taking courses, observing competent, experienced professionals and undertaking practical training under supervision.

The College also recommends several other current references for members' review and consideration when moving into or maintaining competence in this specific practice area (see below).

Please direct any questions to the College of Dietitians of Alberta email: [office@collegeofdietitians.ab.ca](mailto:office@collegeofdietitians.ab.ca).

### **References:**

Alberta Health Services (2013). *Competency in Clinical Feeding & Swallowing Assessment in Adults: Overview of the Clinical Assessment*. Interprofessional Practice Team, Health Professions Strategy and Practice, Alberta Health Services.

College of Dietitians of Alberta (2007). *Code of Ethics*.

College of Dietitians of Alberta (2007). *Professional Practice Handbook for Dietitians in Alberta*. Reviewed online May 7, 2013 from:  
<http://www.collegeofdietitians.ab.ca/Members/Resources.aspx>

College of Dietitians of Ontario (2007). *Dysphagia Policy: Scope of Practice for Registered Dietitians Caring for Clients with Dysphagia in Ontario*.

Dietitians of Canada (2005). *The Role of the Registered Dietitian in Dysphagia Assessment and Treatment: A Discussion Paper*.

Province of Alberta. *Government Organizations Act*; R.S.A 2000, c. G-10  
Province of Alberta. *Health Professions Act*. R.S.A., 2000, c.H-7. Schedule 23  
Registered Dietitians and Registered Nutritionists.

### **Suggested readings:**

Cichero, J. and Murdoch, B. (Eds) (2006). *Dysphagia: foundation, theory and practice*. John Wiley and Sons, Ltd. Brisbane, Australia.

Groher, M.E, and Crary M.A. (2010) *Dysphagia: Clinical Management in Adults and Children*. Mosby Inc, Maryland Heights, Missouri.

Miller, R and Britton, D. (2011). *Dysphagia in Neuromuscular Diseases*. Plural Publishing Inc. United States.

### **Suggested courses:**

Dietitians of Canada. The Science and Art of Dysphagia Assessment and Management. This is an intensive skills-based, 3 day course. Watch for an upcoming session, held next in Toronto in 2015.

Lam, P and Miller, R. Dysphagia Management. Dietitians of Canada online course.