

Chapter 4

Professional Practice Standards

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Professional Practice Standards Requirements

Professional practice standards play a key role in outlining practice requirements for professionals. The *Health Professions Act (HPA)* requires colleges to establish, maintain and enforce standards of practice for regulated health professions (1). The Government also requires that standards of practice be developed by colleges in consultation with their regulated members, the Minister of Health, and other stakeholders. The four documents that outline the professional practice standards for Registered Dietitians and Registered Nutritionists in Alberta are the *Code of Ethics* (please refer to Appendix 2), the *Standards of Practice* (please refer to Appendix 3), the *Standards of Practice: Sexual Abuse and Sexual Misconduct Prevention* (please see Appendix 4), and the *Integrated Competencies for Dietetic Education and Practice* (please refer to Appendix 5). All of these documents must be made available to regulated members of the College of Dietitians of Alberta (the College) and to the public upon request. Together, the Acts, Regulations, bylaws, guidelines, the *Code of Ethics*, the *Standards of Practice*, *Standards of Practice: Sexual Abuse and Sexual Misconduct Prevention* and the *Integrated Competencies for Dietetic Education and Practice* provide the legal framework for dietetic practice and for the provision of competent, safe, professional services.

Code of Ethics

The *Code of Ethics* is a set of principles of professional conduct which establishes the ethical expectations that Registered Dietitians and Registered Nutritionists are required to adhere to in their professional practice. The document outlines the values, accountabilities, and responsibilities by which Registered Dietitians and Registered Nutritionists are expected to conduct their practice. The document also includes an ethical decision framework to assist regulated members in addressing ethical issues.

The *Code of Ethics* should be used by Registered Dietitians and Registered Nutritionists to reflect on practice, by the College to assess the ethical conduct of regulated members and by the public to understand the responsibility and accountability to the profession. As regulated, autonomous professionals, each regulated member of the College is accountable for practicing in accordance with the *Code of Ethics*, regardless of role, practice area or practice setting.

KEY PRACTICE POINT

All Registered Dietitians and Registered Nutritionists are accountable for practicing in accordance with the *Code of Ethics* regardless of their role, practice area or practice setting.

The *Code of Ethics* was developed by the College in consultation with Registered Dietitians and Registered Nutritionists in Alberta under the authority of the HPA and the *Registered Dietitians and Registered Nutritionists Profession Regulation* (1, 2). In meeting its legislated mandate to establish, maintain and enforce standards of practice for regulated health professions, the College recognized the need for a code of ethics applicable to current dietetic practice. The *Code of Ethics* was developed based on a framework created for the provincial dietetic regulatory bodies by Dr. Glenn Griener, Associate Professor of the John Dossetor Health Ethics Centre, University of Alberta. Alberta Registered Dietitians and Registered Nutritionists had the opportunity to review and comment on the draft *Code of Ethics* through workshops and on-line consultations held by the College.

Core Values

The *Code of Ethics* sets out the core values that Registered Dietitians and Registered Nutritionists hold with respect to dietetic practice and fulfilling their obligations to the client, the public and the profession. These core values are as follows:

- Protects the public as the primary professional obligation.
- Respects the autonomy and rights of the individual.
- Acts with integrity in professional services and relationships.
- Maintains competence in dietetic practice.

The *Code of Ethics* supports the College's mission to protect Albertans by regulating the competent practice of Registered Dietitians and Registered Nutritionists.

Integrated Competencies for Dietetic Education and Practice

The *Integrated Competencies for Dietetic Education and Practice* describe the entry-to-practice standard for all Registered Dietitians and Registered Nutritionists in Canada as well as describe the competencies required of all dietitians practicing in Alberta. The document plays a central role in how regulated members gain admission to and remain registered with the College, thereby gaining the right to practice and use the protected titles of the profession. As regulated, autonomous professionals, each regulated member of the College is accountable for practicing in accordance with the *Integrated Competencies for Dietetic Education and Practice*, regardless of role, practice area or practice setting.

The *Integrated Competencies for Dietetic Education and Practice* was created under the authority of the HPA and the *Registered Dietitians and Registered Nutritionists Profession Regulation* (1, 2). In meeting its legislated mandate to establish, maintain and enforce standards of practice for regulated health professions, the College worked with the Partnership for Dietetic Education and Practice, a joint venture of the Alliance of Canadian Dietetic Regulatory Bodies (provincial dietetic regulators), Dietitians of Canada and Canadian academic and practicum dietetic education programs, to develop the *Integrated Competencies for Dietetic Education and Practice*; the document was validated through a national on-line survey completed by dietitians across Canada.

Framework of the *Integrated Competencies for Dietetic Education and Practice*

The standard expressed by the *Integrated Competencies* is a minimum requirement, designed to ensure safe, effective, and ethical entry-level practice. It is understood that once Registered Dietitians and Registered Nutritionists achieve registration and enter the workplace, their competencies will evolve, based upon experience and further education.

A **Practice Competency** is a task that is performed in practice that can be carried out to a specified level of proficiency. The performance of a practice competency requires application of a combination of knowledge, skills, attitudes, and judgments. The practice competencies are organized within a framework consisting of seven domains of competence:

- a. Food and Nutrition Expertise
- b. Professionalism and Ethics
- c. Communication and Collaboration
- d. Management and Leadership
- e. Nutrition Care
- f. Population Health Promotion
- g. Food Provision

A **Performance Indicator** is a task that can be carried out within an assessment vehicle, successful completion of which provides an indication of the individual's ability to perform a practice competency.

Practice Competency:

A task that is performed in practice that can be carried out to a specified level of proficiency

**Performance Indicator:**

A task of which successful completion provides an indication of the individual's ability to perform a practice competency

The *Integrated Competencies for Dietetic Education and Practice* supports the College's mission to protect Albertans by regulating the competent practice of Registered Dietitians or Registered Nutritionists. Specific applications of the *Integrated Competencies for Dietetic Education and Practice* are described below.

Registration & Practice Permits

The *Integrated Competencies for Dietetic Education and Practice* is used in the assessment of applicants to the College and is the foundation of the registration examination approved by the College.

Continuing Competence

The *Integrated Competencies for Dietetic Education and Practice* is a key document in guiding the practice of Registered Dietitians or Registered Nutritionists and facilitates regulated members in evaluating their practice and identifying competency areas requiring further development within the Continuing Competence Program.

Professional Conduct

The *Standards of Practice*, the *Standards of Practice: Sexual Abuse and Sexual Misconduct Prevention*, the *Integrated Competencies for Dietetic Education and Practice* and the *Code of Ethics* are documents which all Registered Dietitians or Registered Nutritionists must adhere to in their professional practice. Contravention of the provisions contained in either of these documents may constitute "unprofessional conduct" as it is defined in the HPA.

Standards of Practice

The *Standards of Practice* describe the minimal practice requirements that must be met by all Registered Dietitians and Registered Nutritionists practicing in Alberta. The document plays a central role in how regulated members remain registered with the College, thereby maintaining the right to practice and use the protected titles of the profession. As regulated, autonomous professionals, each regulated member of the College is accountable for

practicing in accordance with the *Standards of Practice*, regardless of role, practice area or practice setting.

The *Standards of Practice* was created under the authority of the HPA and the *Registered Dietitians and Registered Nutritionists Profession Regulation* (1, 2). In meeting its legislated mandate to establish, maintain and enforce standards of practice for regulated health professions, the College collaborated with the Saskatchewan Dietitians Association (SDA) to establish a Standards of Practice Advisory Group with representation from diverse sectors of the profession in both Alberta and Saskatchewan to develop the *Standards of Practice*; the document was validated through an online survey completed by dietitians in Alberta and Saskatchewan and was validated and submitted to Government for external stakeholder consultation.

KEY PRACTICE POINT

All Registered Dietitians and Registered Nutritionists are accountable for practicing in accordance with the *Standards of Practice* regardless of their role, practice area or practice setting.

Format of the *Standards of Practice*

The *Standards of Practice* includes fifteen standards, applicable to all practicing dietitians. The standards are summarized below.

Standard 1. Assessment and Interventions

Registered Dietitians competently select and interpret assessment data, develop and/or implement goals/plans/tools, and implement appropriate interventions in the provision of client-centred, professional services.

Standard 2. Boundaries

Registered Dietitians maintain clear and appropriate professional boundaries with clients and team members.

Standard 3. Client-Centred Services

Registered Dietitians provide professional services that recognize and respect the unique needs, goals, values, and circumstances of clients.

Standard 4. Collaborative Practice

Registered Dietitians partner with clients and team members in the collaborative and coordinated provision of professional services.

Standard 5. Communication

Registered Dietitians communicate effectively, respectfully, and in compliance with applicable legislative and regulatory requirements when providing professional services.

Standard 6. Competence

Registered Dietitians are responsible and accountable for their continuing competence in order to provide safe, ethical, professional services.

Standard 7. Conflict of Interest

Registered Dietitians will avoid real or perceived conflicts of interest in which professional integrity, professional independence or the provision of professional services could be compromised. Conflicts of interest which cannot be avoided must be disclosed and managed.

Standard 8. Consent

Registered Dietitians obtain appropriate client consent in the provision of professional services.

Standard 9. Evidence-Informed Practice

Registered Dietitians provide professional services using an evidence-informed approach.

Standard 10. Fees and Billing

Registered Dietitians ensure that fees and billing for professional services and/or products are fair, transparent, and in compliance with legislative and regulatory requirements.

Standard 11. Privacy/Confidentiality

Registered Dietitians uphold and protect clients' rights to privacy and confidentiality of information collected during the provision of professional services by complying with applicable legislative and regulatory requirements.

Standard 12. Professional Practice Obligations

Registered Dietitians protect the public by providing professional services in compliance with applicable legislative and regulatory requirements.

Standard 13. Promotions/Advertising

Registered Dietitians provide information and advertise their professional services and/or products in compliance with applicable legislative and regulatory requirements.

Standard 14. Record Keeping

Registered Dietitians document and manage client records and /or other data in compliance with applicable legislative, regulatory, and/or organizational/employer requirements.

Standard 15. Safety and Risk Management

Registered Dietitians adhere to occupational health and safety legislation, and infection prevention and control practices to provide safe, competent, ethical professional services.

The Standards of Practice are organized under the headings:

- a. **Standard Statement:** outlines the expected performance of regulated members.
- b. **Indicators:** describe the specific activities demonstrated by regulated members complying with the Standard. The Indicators are not listed in order of priority nor are they all inclusive.
- c. **Practice Outcome:** defines what clients and team members can expect from the professional services of regulated members.

- d. **Related Standards:** includes a list of additional Standards providing more information.
- e. **Glossary:** includes definitions of specific terms used in each Standard. Words are bolded the first time they appear in the Standard.
- f. **Resources:** provide a list of references with background information related to the Standard.

The *Standards of Practice* support the College's mission to protect Albertans by regulating the competent practice of Registered Dietitians or Registered Nutritionists. Specific applications of the *Standards of Practice* are described below.

Standards of Practice: Sexual Abuse and Sexual Misconduct Prevention

The *Standards of Practice: Sexual Abuse and Sexual Misconduct Prevention* describe the practice requirements in compliance with *Bill 21: An Act to Protect Patients* under the *Health Professions Act (HPA)*, that must be met by all Registered Dietitians and Registered Nutritionists practicing in Alberta. As regulated, autonomous professionals, each regulated member of the College is accountable for practicing in accordance with the *Standards of Practice: Sexual Abuse and Sexual Misconduct Prevention*, regardless of role, practice area or practice setting.

The *Standards of Practice: Sexual Abuse and Sexual Misconduct Prevention* were created under the authority of the *HPA*. In meeting its legislated mandate to establish, maintain and enforce standards of practice for regulated health professions, the College developed the *Standards of Practice: Sexual Abuse and Sexual Misconduct Prevention* with consultation from dietitians in Alberta and was validated and submitted to Government for external stakeholder consultation.

KEY PRACTICE POINT

All Registered Dietitians and Registered Nutritionists are accountable for practicing in accordance with the *Standards of Practice* regardless of their role, practice area or practice setting.

Format of this *Standards of Practice*

The *Standards of Practice: Sexual Abuse and Sexual Misconduct Prevention* includes two standards, applicable to all practicing dietitians. The standards are summarized below.

Standard 1.

Registered Dietitians abstain from conduct, behaviour, or remarks towards patients that constitutes sexual abuse or sexual misconduct as defined in the *Health Professions Act*.

Standard 2.

The Registered Dietitian or former Registered Dietitian does not engage in a sexual relationship with a former patient (or their immediate family member) until at least one year has passed from the time of the last documented health care/professional service interaction.

The *Standards of Practice: Sexual Abuse and Sexual Misconduct Prevention* support the College's mission to protect Albertans by regulating the competent practice of Registered Dietitians or Registered Nutritionists. Specific applications of the two Standards documents (*Standards of*

Practice and the Standards of Practice: Sexual Abuse and Sexual Misconduct Prevention) are described below.

Registration & Practice Permits

The two *Standards of Practice* documents inform prospective College regulated members of the performance expectations of dietetic practice in Alberta. They also outline the minimal practice requirements that all registered Dietitians and Registered Nutritionists must adhere to.

Professional Conduct

The two *Standards of Practice* documents, the *Integrated Competencies for Dietetic Education and Practice* and the *Code of Ethics* are documents which all Registered Dietitians or Registered Nutritionists must adhere to in their professional practice. Contravention of the provisions contained in any of these documents may constitute “unprofessional conduct” as it is defined in the *HPA*.

Chapter Summary

The *Health Professions Act (HPA)* requires colleges to establish, maintain and enforce standards of practice for regulated health professions. The three documents that outline the professional practice standards for Registered Dietitians and Registered Nutritionists in Alberta are the *Code of Ethics*, the *Integrated Competencies for Dietetic Education and Practice*, the *Standards of Practice*, and the *Standards of Practice: Sexual Abuse and Sexual Misconduct Prevention*. Together, the Acts, Regulations, bylaws, guidelines, the *Code of Ethics*, the *Integrated Competencies for Dietetic Education and Practice*, the *Standards of Practice*, and the *Standards of Practice: Sexual Abuse and Sexual Misconduct Prevention* provide the legal framework for dietetic practice and for the provision of competent, safe, professional services. The *Code of Ethics* is a set of principles of professional conduct which establishes the ethical expectations that Registered Dietitians and Registered Nutritionists are required to adhere to in their professional practice. The *Integrated Competencies for Dietetic Education and Practice* set the education and training requirements for entry into the profession across Canada as well as describe the competencies required of all dietitians practicing in Alberta. The *Standards of Practice* and the *Standards of Practice: Sexual Abuse and Sexual Misconduct Prevention* describe the standards that must be met by all Registered Dietitians and Registered Nutritionists practicing in Alberta. All Registered Dietitians and Registered Nutritionists must practice in accordance with the *Code of Ethics*, the *Standards of Practice*, the *Standards of Practice: Sexual Abuse and Sexual Misconduct Prevention* and the *Integrated Competencies for Dietetic Education and Practice*. Contravention of the provisions contained in any of these documents may constitute “unprofessional conduct” as it is defined in the *HPA*.

Case Scenario 4.1

SS is a single mom who works a .75 FTE position at the hospital in a mid size Alberta community. In addition to her work at the hospital, she provides private contracted services to the auxiliary care home. She feels constantly torn between competing responsibilities – her job, her children, her professional obligations while also dealing with other personal matters. She would like to participate in an on-line course that would also help her to meet the Continuing Competence Program requirements of the College. The course requires that she participate in a teleconference twice weekly for one month, but the timing conflicts with her contract at the auxiliary care home. There is a room where she could participate in the teleconference with no one knowing. She could “sign off” the long-distance charges as part of her practice and reimburse the facility as appropriate. She can make up the time with the residents later. (Although the Policy & Procedure Manual states that each resident will be seen weekly, most will not even know that she was not there.) She will try to pop in and check on the residents when she can, then take the files home and chart on them while she is at the arena with the kids.

Case Scenario 4.1 Questions

1. What are the concerns in the way in which SS is conducting her practice?
2. Is SS practicing in accordance with the *Code of Ethics*? If not, identify the specific areas that she would have contravened.
3. Is SS practicing in accordance with the *Standards of Practice* and the *Integrated Competencies for Dietetic Education and Practice*? If not, identify the specific areas that she would have contravened.
4. If SS were a friend of yours, what advice would you give her?

Chapter Quiz

1. All of the following statements are true **except** for the following:
 - a) The *Code of Ethics* outlines the values, accountabilities, and responsibilities by which Registered Dietitians and Registered Nutritionists are expected to conduct their practice.
 - b) The Government of Canada requires colleges to establish, maintain and enforce standards of practice for regulated health professions.
 - c) Contravention of the provisions contained in either the *Code of Ethics*, the *Standards of Practice* or the *Integrated Competencies for Dietetic Education and Practice* may constitute “unprofessional conduct” as defined in the *Health Professions Act*.
 - d) The *Standards of Practice* and the *Integrated Competencies for Dietetic Education and Practice* describe the standards and competencies that must be met by all Registered Dietitians and Registered Nutritionists practicing in Alberta.

2. A Registered Dietitian or Registered Nutritionist names and discusses a client while having coffee with colleagues in a hospital cafeteria. This Registered Dietitian or Registered Nutritionist would be in breach of Section _____ of the *Code of Ethics*.
 - a) 2.1 (9)
 - b) 2.2 (1) a
 - c) 2.3 (3)
 - d) 2.4 (1)

3. The *Integrated Competencies for Dietetic Education and Practice* have clear application in the following areas:
 - a) Registration and Licensing
 - b) Continuing Competence
 - c) Professional Conduct
 - d) All of the above
 - e) Answers a and b only

4. All of the following statements are true **except** for the following:
 - a) The *Code of Ethics*, the *Standards of Practice* and the *Integrated Competencies for Dietetic Education and Practice* are private documents available only to Registered Dietitians and Registered Nutritionists registered with the College of Dietitians of Alberta.
 - b) The requirement for competent practice is addressed in the *Code of Ethics*, the *Standards of Practice*, the *Standards of Practice: Sexual Abuse and Sexual Misconduct Prevention* and the *Integrated Competencies for Dietetic Education and Practice*.
 - c) A standard statement outlines the expected performance of regulated members.
 - d) Under the *Health Professions Act*, standards of practice must be developed by colleges in consultation with their regulated members, the Minister of Health, and other stakeholders.

References

1. Province of Alberta. *Health Professions Act*; R.S.A. 2000, c. H-7.
2. Province of Alberta. *Registered Dietitians and Registered Nutritionists Profession Regulation*; 2002.