

WHY LICENSE DIETITIANS?

Dietitians are not currently licensed in Wisconsin. As a result, a wide variety of people, some with no qualifications, call themselves “nutrition experts”. Bookstores, television infomercials and nutrition or weight loss websites are filled with a dizzying array of products and information. The public deserves to know when the information being given by “experts” is based on science. They also deserve to know if the information is being given by people who have appropriate education and experience.

Licensing of dietitians protects the public by defining minimum education and experience requirements for experts in food and nutrition who provide nutrition therapy in the treatment of various diseases. The state has an obligation to protect the health and safety of the public and licensing of dietitians is one way a state acts on this obligation. Thirty-five states as well as District of Columbia and Puerto Rico currently license dietitians.

Self-styled experts can point to “certificates” and “diplomas” that they purchased rather than earned. Consumers may have a hard time differentiating these “diploma” credentials from valid, earned credentials. This is especially critical for consumers with chronic medical conditions who could experience serious harm as a result of improper nutrition counseling. Bad health outcomes lead to higher health care costs that are borne by all of us.

State licensing will help improve the availability and accessibility of high-quality nutrition services. Since these services are highly cost-effective, the taxpayer will benefit from short-term and long-term savings of health care dollars. Without licensing many insurance companies are reluctant to reimburse the cost of nutrition counseling because there is no standard for who is providing these services.

State legislatures are charged with protecting the health and safety of the public. (The federal government does not set professional standards). Accordingly, every state regulates occupations and professions that have an impact on the public’s health and safety. Wisconsin currently licenses virtually every other health care provider, including physicians, dentists, nurses, physician assistants, physical therapists, chiropractors, optometrists, occupational therapists, speech pathologists, audiologists, dental hygienists and acupuncturists. Licensure laws protect the public from unscrupulous and unqualified individuals who would portray themselves as health care experts. For this same reason, public safety and health will be further enhanced by state licensure of dietitians.

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