

## **Career Path Crossroads: Exploration of Various Layers of Professional Diversity Within the Dietetics Industry**

*Written by: Thomas Venezia, Dietetic Intern at Ohio State University, a Student Member of COGA*



I'm in my office at 11:30 AM and I've got two more appointments until lunch. I'm pushing four years as a nutritionist for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC). While the work is manageable, it's not as challenging and rewarding as it was when I first started and I feel as though I'm on auto-pilot. I had carved a comfortable niche where I was, but no longer found my work fulfilling. The desire to be an effective nutritionist was lacking and took a toll on my morale.

This was the impetus for my first major professional transition within the nutrition and dietetics industry.

Though people have different motives for making a career change, one reason behind the concept stays uniform: **some people aren't stationary and are prone to change over time.** Older professionals, in particular, aren't an exception, with [studies showing that many find varying degrees of success in changing careers](#). Some may strive to make small changes, such as an EMT becoming a nurse, while others find their new calling in a vastly different profession, [such as a doctor becoming an actor or a comedian](#).

Though the concept may seem unusual going from one area of work into another, this practice is welcoming as it brings new perspective as well as skills that could be invaluable. Whatever direction this mindset takes you, it's important to be prepared with an understanding of what opportunities are out in the world of dietetics before making the leap.

An RD isn't just someone who tells people how to eat. There are various traits and skills that RDs possess, including:

- Supervising others
- Employing problem-solving techniques
- Utilizing verbal and non-verbal skills
- Applying critical reasoning skills
- Team building/collaborating with others
- Writing and communicating effectively and professionally

These are some of the characteristics that make RDs capable of transitioning to positions outside or within the dietetics industry.

### **What Opportunities Within the Dietetic Industry are Available?**

There are various sectors to choose from within the dietetics industry. The 1,400 members of the [Cultures of Gender and Age \(COGA\) Member Interest Group](#) represent the plethora of opportunities within the profession. Many of us work in a variety of healthcare and wellness settings including, but not limited to, hospitals, assisted living and long-term care facilities, as well as government agencies, community nutrition programs, consulting and private practice, and university and corporate settings.

**Health Promotion/Disease Prevention:** For four years, I worked in this sector as a nutritionist, engaging with the public in ways to deliver programs ranging from nutrition to physical activity. Various components of the nutrition care process can be a staple here. This area is great for those looking to become involved in community outreach and collaborate with other public services. Possibilities in this area include working for programs such as:

- Women, Infants, and Children (WIC)
- Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)
- State Dept. of Public Health
- Corporate Wellness Programs

**Research:** This is a domain for those intent in pursuing knowledge and incorporate it with existing practices. In research, an RD takes the findings of evidence-based science and translates them into applicable standards and recommendations for practitioners to use. For those who are good at disseminating and analyzing data to make conclusions, this is an enticing area. The opportunity for higher education may also encourage RDs to make transition here. Possibilities in this area include working for programs such as:

- NIH (National Institute of Health)
- University/Collegiate Research Program

**Public Policy:** This may be misconstrued as lobbying or getting into politics. In reality, qualities such as “informer,” “influencer,” and “advocate” convey a better sense of what is to be expected. Individuals in public policy are foundation makers who take evidence from research or studies conducted and make them reality for today's RD. If interested in becoming active in policy changing, this would be a great place to start. Possibilities in this area include working in capacities such as:

- Nutrition Policy Advocate (various companies, especially non-profits)

- Policy Advisor for Food Industry
- Analyst for Nutrition Organizations
- Regulatory Affairs

**Clinical Health Care:** Collaborating with members of the healthcare team, this area encompasses medical nutrition therapy skills. Some overlaps are seen with public policy (as an advocate for future nutrition practices involving patient care) as well as public health (use of nutrition care process for patients) domains. Possibilities in this area include working for programs such as:

- Inpatient RD (hospitals, health specialized facilities)
- Long-Term Care RD (nursing homes, nursing homes)
- Outpatient Care RD (medical clinics, private practice)

**Foodservice Management:** Leading a team to provide nutrition services, foodservice management could be a refreshing opportunity for RDs looking to gain insight in the world of management. RDs looking to transition into the business world could find this domain invaluable in providing a sound starting spot. Possibilities in this area include working for programs such as:

- Culinary and Health Education
- Food Safety Specialist/Inspector
- Food Service Management (Director, Assoc. Director, support staff)

**Retail Dietetics:** This area is a viable and steadily growing sector. For those with excellent customer service skills, as well as personable, outgoing, and vibrant personalities, this may prove to be a viable option. Possibilities in this area include working with organizations such as:

- Corporate or In-store Retail RD
- Supermarket or Grocery Retail Consultant
- Business Solutions Segment Specialist

**Higher Education:** This area can be for those who want to impact the minds of tomorrow. It is a route vital for the continued growth of the dietetics industry. In addition, it is common for those with ample experience to move into this area as those with ample experience can offer expertise for creating and implementing curriculum. Possibilities in this area include working in capacities such as:

- Health Educator
- Collegiate Professor
- Dietetic Internship Program Advisor or Director

**Here's a list of career resources from the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics to help you if considering a professional transition within the dietetics industry:**

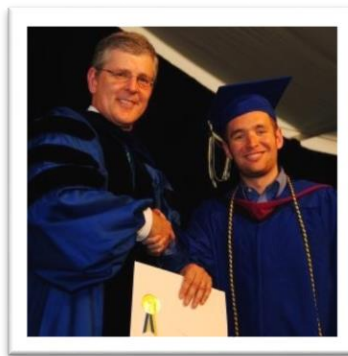
[EatRightPro Career Resources](#): Academy membership provides access to a variety of resources that help take your career to the next level at any stage — from student to seasoned professional.

[EatRightPro Career Center](#): Provides job listings for job seekers and allows employers to post jobs and more.

[Careers In Dietetics - Becoming A Registered Dietitian or Registered Dietitian Nutritionist](#): For COGA student members, explore employment opportunities, salaries, job outlook and information on financial aid as you navigate the steps toward becoming an RD.

The level of opportunity within the dietetics industry is immense and vast, and can be intimidating. Rather than be intimidated, embrace the challenge. **Ask yourself: where do I want to go next and what do I want to do there?** The possibilities of where your RD credentials can take you are larger than you may think, and as long as something feels like your calling, you can't go wrong.

### **About The Author**



My name is Thomas M Venezia. I graduated from the University of Delaware with a BS in Dietetics and Minor in Health and Wellness, and am currently an intern enrolled in the Dietetic Program at The Ohio State University. Prior to working with Ohio State (that's The Ohio State!), I was both a nutritionist and supervisor for various WIC local agencies in southern New Jersey. In addition, I am a former EMT and EMS volunteer for the state of NJ.

In my time as a volunteer as well as an employee, I have learned much from working with various teams in order to accomplish all sorts of goals. More importantly, I've learned to value two core components that make an individual stand out: Efficiency

and Effectiveness. I make it a personal mission to implement both of these components into all endeavors I encounter to make the most of those experiences.

Working in the world we do today, discrimination and adversity can come in all shapes and sizes. As practicing dietitians, it is imperative to be familiar with not just the most up to date knowledge but the understanding that, to be a member of a healthcare team is to be an essential cog in a continuously functioning and ever-adaptive machine. I search for ways to integrate health sciences with leadership and team-building to produce a highly capable unit. I welcome you to connect with me on [LinkedIn](#).