Exploration of Career Opportunities in Nutrition

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Introduction

The field of nutrition and dietetics is an emerging field with endless opportunities for a variety of career options. Careers in this field can truly be customized to fit a multitude of specific interests. Although clinical dietetics can seem to be the focus that most dietetics students are guided toward, having a nutritional science degree or a registered dietitian (RD) certification will lead to a job market of thousands of professional avenues.

Kerry Americas Nutritionist - Nancy

Kerry Ingredients & Flavours collaborates with food and beverage manufacturing and foodservice companies in over 120 countries to deliver expertise in food market trends, product development and production and commercialization. With its American division headquartered in Beloit, Wisconsin, Kerry Americas provides food and beverage ingredients and solutions for foodservice organizations across the nation to help grow their businesses (1).

From dinner kits and mixes to dietary control meals, Kelly Americas’ nutrition team provides innovative product solutions in the areas of food technology (packaging and shelf life), market expertise (food trends, consumer demands, legislation), and culinary and sensory expertise (flavor and freshness). Kerry Americas strives to help their clients meet their business goals and consumer needs, whether it be easy-to-prepare and cost-effective items, ensuring flavor and freshness, or providing nutrition solutions through heart-healthy options or cholesterol-reducing alternatives (1).

As the public interest in nutrition grows, the demand for nutritionists by food manufacturers and food ingredient companies is on the rise. Nutritionists in this field play an integral role in the areas of product development, nutritional analysis, and nutrition consultation with food service organizations and establishments (2). Nutritionists must be well versed in the areas of food science, food policy and regulation, as well as communication to produce trusted products that uphold safety regulations and federal standards. Nutritionists in this career are crucial for applying their expertise to track trends and identify opportunities that meet consumer expectations and support the growth of
their clients. Furthermore, they work to apply food science knowledge to improve formulas and create competitive products to meet taste, performance and packaging standards (3). In recent decades, a major advancement in food science has been the discovery and exploration of taste receptors of the human tongue. G-protein-coupled receptors (GPCRs), in particular, are of interest to food manufacturers, as they provide numerous opportunities for the production of ingredients that might trigger them (4).

According to Salary.com, a comparable position in a similar region would range from $45,410 and $68,000, depending on education and level of experience. The nutritionist at Kerry Americas would possess an M.S. or Ph.D. in Nutritional Science, as well as at least five years of experience with a branded food manufacturer or large food ingredient company. With extensive education and experience under their belt, the nutritionist would support Kerry Americas with nutrition and food service expertise as well as superior communication and organizational skills to lead the nutrition team. The responsibilities of the nutritionist would be to stay up-to-date on the latest nutrition trends, research, and legislation affecting food and food service operations (5). According to a survey conducted by the National Restaurant Association, current U.S. food trends include locally grown produce, bite-size or mini desserts, organic produce, nutritionally-balanced items for children, and new cuts of meat (6). Through knowledge of current restaurant trends and customer demands, the nutritionist would serve as the expert in product development and the identification of nutrition opportunities.

**Body Unique Nutritionist - Nancy**

Body Unique is a health and fitness studio that provides customized wellness and nutrition programs aimed at helping clients achieve their fitness goals (7). The nutritionist at Body Unique will work one-on-one with clients to create a personalized nutrition plan that will complement their fitness goals to help clients meet their needs and provide support, education and motivation every step of the way (8).
With the obesity epidemic growing in our country, fitness and weight loss facilities have grown in popularity, with the number of clubs nearly doubling since the beginning of the decade (9). The marriage between fitness and nutrition has become an important one in the area of fitness environments as our society begins to see the growing importance of nutrition in meeting their fitness goals. Having an RD on-site to provide nutritional consultation provides greater guidance and support, and helps to enhance the value of their membership experience (10).

Many studies have looked at the effectiveness of community-based weight control programs in overweight and obese individuals. In one study in particular, 31 participants at a local gym were placed in a program aimed at improving both physical activity and diet. The 12-week program proved effective in decreasing energy and fat intake, and improving body weight, anthropometric measurements and diastolic blood pressure (11).

In addition to weight loss goals, many individuals looking to improve athletic performance, whether for personal or professional reasons, would benefit from the added nutrition component in a training facility or gym. According to a position statement by the American Dietetic Association, it is crucial for athletes and individuals involved in high-intensity and/or long-duration training to consume adequate energy to maximize training effects and minimize loss of muscle mass, menstrual dysfunction, and loss of bone density (12).

According to Payscale.com, the salary range for a comparable position in this location is between $30,000 and $52,000. The experienced nutritionist should possess a minimum of a bachelor’s degree and two years of experience in the field, and be passionate about making a difference in peoples’ lives. The nutritionist should be compassionate, understanding and supportive to help coach clients to overcome challenges. The nutritionist should also possess excellent written and communication skills, as well as the knowledge to evaluate and perform assessments to track clients’ progress (8).
The role of nutrition education is to unveil the multi-factorial science of nutrition by addressing personal and environmental influences on food choice and dietary behavior so that our community of professionals can assist individuals in practicing health behaviors (13). In the field of family and consumer sciences specifically, education in nutrition, child and adolescent growth and nutritional needs, and education of foods is fundamental. The impact an individual has in this position on public health is tremendous. From teaching soon-to-be professionals who will make an impact in the career path they choose, to actually changing the food habits and dietary behavior of the students they instruct, professors in this field are very influential. Research has demonstrated that nutrition education which focuses on human physiology, energy metabolism, and genetics helps prevent weight gain in college-aged females (14).

The role of the professor in Family and Consumer Sciences at Point Loma Nazarene University is a unique one. While a PhD/Ed.D is required, the candidate should be able to teach across the spectrum of family and consumer sciences, which includes dietetics, nutrition and food, fashion and interiors, child and adolescent development, and family and consumer sciences. For the PhD in nutrition, this may provide a very exciting niche in which to teach (15). The knowledge and skills the candidate has cultivated in the nutritional research and dietetics fields, as well as child and adolescent development and nutritional needs, could be paired with an individual's interest in more creative arts (e.g. fashion and interiors). Students in the nutritional science field come from a plethora of backgrounds including family and consumer sciences, many of which may have goals of combining their previous expertise with their professional degree in nutritional science in their career.

The job of college professor was ranked third among 50 in CNN’s Best Jobs in America 2009 poll. The drawbacks of this position include the low starting pay below $70,000, and the approximate 50% salary gap between professors at the university. Constantly publishing new work can also present a challenge. However, there are many benefits to the position which include ample scheduling
freedom, time off for the holidays, and reduced summer workload. The average salary in this position is around $70,400, and according to CNN, can increase up to around $115,000/year. The opportunity for ten-year job growth was estimated at around a substantial 23% and 278,000 current jobs in the field. Quality of life ratings in this poll were also great, with an ‘A’ in personal satisfaction and benefit to society, and a ‘B’ in job security, future growth, and stress level (16).

**Healthy Dining: Project Manager – Kyrié**

The Healthy Dining Program was developed to provide an effective solution for improving restaurant nutrition, as restaurants have been challenged to offer healthy dining choices. Since 1990, the program has focused on helping restaurants by attracting new customers and improving customer loyalty, strengthening the competitive edge of participating restaurants, improving their PR image and promoting corporate citizenship, demonstrating an attitude of pro-activity for healthy choices in restaurant menus, and attracting health-conscious customers who may chose to dine elsewhere (17). Healthy menu development has become a popular goal within the foodservice industry, and has even spread to hotel chains that have been busy revamping their food and beverage options to accommodate the increasing health awareness among their patrons (18).

Under the Healthy Dining Program, participating restaurants receive many benefits related to their menu development and marketing opportunities (17). They receive nutritional analysis services and recipe modification consultation in addition to placement on healthydiningfinder.com, marketing tools and branding materials, and publicity through the Healthy Dining Program’s partners (17). Healthydiningfinder.com is easy to use as it allows consumers to type a zip code into the search bar and receive instant information on healthy dining partners in a given radius (18).

The Healthy Dining Program registered dietitian working as Project Manager/Nutrition Researcher in food science is responsible for assisting the Primary Investigator on a two-year NIH-funded study on taste tests of restaurant meals with various nutrition compositions. Additionally, the candidate for this position is responsible for designing and writing proposals for future studies on
healthy meals in restaurants, assisting with quality control, and researching other food-related issues in the restaurant setting including dilution effects and cooking losses (19). According to ExploreHealthCareers.org, a registered research dietician in a similar position earns approximately $42,000 – 55,000/year (20). The candidate for this position should have a PhD, MPH, or MS in food science, Nutrition, Behavior Studies, or a related science degree. Likewise, this candidate should possess creativity and communication skills, the ability to work with a nutrition-oriented team, and the ability to pay close attention to detail (19).

**Kyrie’s Career Plan**

From a young age, I dreamed of a career in medicine. As my education progressed through the years, the critical nature of our health, wellness and environment in optimizing our cellular functions, more specifically in optimizing our genetic processes, were the most intriguing subjects to me. My dream became more focused as a young adult, and I began working toward applications for medical school and hoped to pursue the field of Oncology. An unfortunate family event lead me to realize that becoming a physician was not for me, but shifted me to a desire to treat illness and disease with nutrition. I have always been certain that my passion for wellness would someday, in one way or another, evolve into a career.

Now that I am fervently working toward my career in nutrition and dietetics, I see that there are hundreds of career opportunities awaiting me. In my graduate studies in nutrition I have most enjoyed research. I have worked on two animal studies, and am beginning my third study in human participants. My enjoyment for research cannot be overlooked in my future career choice. I have recently begun a new internship with the UCSD Moore’s Center for Cancer Research and am working with dieticians there on data entry, clinical visits, weight loss studies in individuals with type 2 diabetes mellitus, and weight loss studies for cancer survivors. I am very confident that I will be involved in nutrition research in my career, whether it is the main focus of my path or not.

Clinical dietetics is very interesting to me as well, and while I am open to any specialty, I
have a particular desire to work in pediatrics. In my medical nutrition therapy education, I have been most interested and inspired by medical nutrition therapy for cancer patients, gastrointestinal disorders, and feeding problems. As of now, I can visualize myself thriving in those areas, but am very excited to learn more about other specialties during my clinical rotations in my internship. I would love to participate in a project, similar to what I am currently working on with the UCSD team, which would include research and medical nutrition therapy for oncology patients or cancer survivors. I have a family member who has been affected by this disease, and I feel I could be an asset to the field with my personal experiences coupled with my passion for the subject in general.

Ultimately, I hope to one day earn my Ph.D. in Nutritional Science or Preventative Medicine. I hope to contribute in some way to the constantly emerging knowledge of cancer treatment and prevention. I am looking forward to a lifetime of continuous learning opportunities in this field, and for my personal growth through the process.

Nancy’s Career Plan

My personal career goal is to obtain a position in a weight management facility or clinic where I can work with high-risk individuals with metabolic syndrome to modify their risk factors through weight loss and improvement of their lipid profile to lower their risk of coronary artery disease and type II diabetes. I believe a position that promotes awareness and prevention would be highly rewarding.

Aside from working at a weight management facility, I would also be interested in obtaining a position within a fitness studio that provides both fitness and nutritional support. Many individuals struggle with the challenge of trying to lose weight on their own and often give up when they don’t see the results they desire. Many do not realize that a crucial component of reaching their fitness goals starts with their diet. I feel that a position at a facility that encompasses both fitness and nutrition would be an exciting place to work, and I believe this is an area in our industry that will continue to expand in the coming decades.
I will work towards my goals by completing my master’s degree in Nutritional Sciences and the Didactic Program in Dietetics (DPD) in the fall of 2013. From there I will perform a seven month Commission on Accreditation for Dietetics Education (CADE) internship, where I am looking to gain experience in this area by including a rotation at the Weight Management division of Scripps Health Clinic in Del Mar. Upon completion of my internship and the passing of the Commission on Dietetic Registration (CDR) exam, I hope to implement my career goals by obtaining a position at a weight management clinic.

**Conclusion**

Having a degree in nutritional science, as well as becoming a registered dietitian, provides the credentials and expertise for a wide variety of positions in various areas. From food science and health and wellness, to education and research, the possibilities are endless for a professional in this field.
References


