



# Nutrition Society – News Bits

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The Nutrition Society of South Africa is a scientific organisation and the main aims are to advance the scientific study of nutrition; to promote objective dissemination of knowledge related to nutrition; and to promote strategies for the improvement of nutrition well-being.

Welcome to the new news page of the Nutrition Society of South Africa. Watch this space in future for interesting information from the Society.

## Registration of Nutritionists

### Background information

According to the Health Professions Act 56 of 1974 (section 33), all persons active in the scope of nutrition must be registered.

The registration of nutritionists has been a point of discussion since the early 1980s when the Professional Board for Dietetics was formed and registration became compulsory for dietitians in 1983/4. Changes within the structures of the Health Professions Council post 1994 has led to the decision that nutritionists should register with the Professional Board for Dietetics and that the name would change to represent both groups.

A National Working Group was established with representation from the Department of Health, the Nutrition Society, research organisations, non-governmental organisations, etc., and a document: 'Scope and practice for the registration of nutritionists in South Africa' (August 2001) was compiled.

On 6 December 2002 the intention to register nutritionists was promulgated in the *Government Gazette*.

After several other draft documents and meetings the reworked proposal was submitted to the Professional Board for Dietetics on 6 April 2004 for deliberation by the Education Committee of the Board.

### What are the difficulties round the registration of nutritionists that have been holding back the process?

Requirements for registration of any category of worker include:

- A professional body. At the moment the Nutrition Society is regarded as the professional body. This organisation, however, is not a professional body, but rather a scientific organisation/research interest group, that has now accepted the challenge.
- A unique scope of practice.
- Dedicated training programmes.

The latter two are still very problematic.

### What is the definition of a nutritionist that will be registered?

A nutritionist is a person responsible for the promotion of nutrition health and well-being and prevention of nutrition-related disorders/ill health of groups, communities or populations. Nutritionists will not be involved in therapeutic interventions in individual clients/patients/communities.

### The way forward

There are still several issues that need to be solved before the registration of nutritionists will become a reality. The council

members of the Nutrition Society, however, are hard at work trying to make the registration of nutritionists in South Africa a reality as soon as possible.

### Rina Swart

Council member  
Nutrition Society of South Africa

## A Discussion with International Nutrition Experts

### Short report of a meeting organised by the Northern Branch of the Nutrition Society of SA at the DSM's Isando office on 12 May 2004.

A group of 30 nutritionists and dietitians met for a debate with Professors Jo Hautvast and Barrie Margetts. Professor Hautvast (former Head of the Department of Human Nutrition at Wageningen University, The Netherlands, 1972 - 2000, and Director of Wageningen Center for Food Sciences, 2000-2004) exemplified how in this time of globalisation nutritional health, and thus nutritional training and research, should definitely have strong international dimensions but also pay attention to the fact that nutrition problems can be specific for various groups in a population, in a country or a region. The group concluded that 'we', scientists and policy makers, should regard international policy documents such as, for example, the World Health Organisation's 'Global strategy on diet, physical activity and health' or the US Institute of Medicine's 'Dietary Reference Intakes' as guidelines – as these organisations intend them to be – rather than as the universal truth. In SA, 'we' should proactively formulate country-specific guidelines/policies, for which these documents could well form the basis. Professor Margetts (Extraordinary Professor at North-West University, SA and Assistant Professor in Public Health Nutrition at the University of Southampton, UK) illustrated part of the process behind the scenes necessary for translating evidence to action. He stressed the importance of systematic reviews and highlighted some of the methodological difficulties encountered when conducting them. In the discussion that followed, it was concluded that for nutritional research to be converted into public health policies in SA, relevant topics should be identified, prioritised and thorough systematic reviews be conducted. It was suggested that such systematic reviews could form the literature survey in theses for MSc and PhD students training in Nutrition in South Africa. How these ideas can be translated into action still has to crystallise, but a web-based forum or the formation of specific task forces, which could 'meet' via teleconferences, are examples of feasible, transparent and low-cost approaches. This was a lively debate and both professors have given us a lot of food for thought for the way home and long thereafter.

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