

Evaluating the Impact of a Dietitian

Overview



- **Program Objective:** Assist beneficiaries in leading healthy lifestyles by offering comprehensive dietitian services on base
- **Total Force Fitness Domains:** Nutritional, Psychological, Physical, Medical and Dental, Behavioral

Program Description



- Dietitians stationed on the installation provide a range of services to beneficiaries in both individual and group settings, including: Medical Nutrition Therapy (MNT) counseling, nutrition and cooking classes (such as Cooking Matters), weight remediation programs, menu renovation (such as Go for Green), outreach at health promotions fairs. Dietitians develop nutrition plans and exercise regimens tailored to the needs and lifestyle of the individual; as dietitians are held to high quality standards specific to their area of expertise, **such interactions cannot be replaced by generic nutrition advice provided by a General Practitioner or nurse, or through a self-help weight loss group or internet resources¹**
- Some dietitians are integrated into the wellness community (Quantico dietitian operates from MWR gym), while those at other installations interviewed are largely embedded in the primary care clinic at the MTF

Evidence of Program Effectiveness



- **Registered Dietitians (RD) have a positive impact on both financial and health outcomes**
- According to a study prepared for DOD Health Affairs, RDs counseling over 636,000 patients **saved the DOD \$3.1M in the first year of MNT (\$4.5M in 2015 dollars)²**
- In another study, **\$14.58 = ROI for every dollar invested in RD-led lifestyle modification program³**
- **Productivity Increase:** study showed that patients treated by RDs took an average of 0.92 days of sick leave vs. 3.49 days taken by those who received only written information¹

Costs and Required Resources

- 1 GS-11 dietitian salary: \$57,562 (avg.) x 1266 dietitians needed to cover beneficiary population (9.5 M) = ~\$72M salary cost annually DOD-wide
- Additional program costs include facility, class and marketing materials

Key Takeaways



- **Financial benefit (healthcare savings) outweighs the cost of maintaining dietitians in the long-term**
- **Dietitians are uniquely positioned as both healthcare providers and health promoters;** they serve as an integral part of the team implementing health policies that affect beneficiaries (ie. Work through Community Health Promotion Council to improve healthy food options)
- **Dietitians are versatile:** they can provide therapeutic and lifestyle/behavioral focused education *and* generate workload (RVUs); workload can be tailored to high-demand, lower risk (group weight management classes) or low-demand, high risk (individual appointment for gestational diabetes)
- **Dietitians may serve as force multipliers for wellness centers on the installation**
 - At Fort Meade, dietitian and AWC coordinate closely to discuss treatment plans for individuals; refer patients to each others' services
- If dietitians are stationed on the installation, **their services will be utilized;** if dietitians are not stationed on the installation, beneficiaries will either **not receive treatment** or have to **pay out of pocket for treatment elsewhere**, as services are not covered by TRICARE

References

1. Produce for Better Health Foundation. <http://www.pbhfoundation.org/>
2. Human Performance Resource Center. Go For Green. <http://hprc-online.org/nutrition/go-for-green>
3. Greater Use of Preventive Services in U.S. Health Care Could Save Lives at Little or No Cost. Maciosek, Michael V. et al. Health Affairs 29, No. 9 (2010): 1656-1660.