



Dispelling Myths of the College's Professional Practice Advisory Service

Carole Chatalalsingh, PhD, RD
Practice Advisor & Policy Analyst

carole.chatalalsingh@collegeofdietitians.org

The mandate of the College is to regulate Registered Dietitians (RDs) in the interest of public protection. We believe that one of the best ways to protect the public is to support RDs in the delivery of safe, ethical and competent nutrition services. The College's Practice Advisory Service (PAS) helps fulfill this mandate. It offers guidance to RDs when they have legal, ethical and professional questions or concerns having an impact on the delivery of safe, client-centred nutrition care.

RDs can feel confident that the Practice Advisory Service is there to support them in a safe and non-punitive environment. We hope that this article will help dispel some of the myths surrounding the PAS and encourage more RDs to call any time they need guidance and support to enhance their practice.

The Practice Advisory Service is a safe environment for members to seek guidance with confidence.

MYTH: RDS MUST IDENTIFY THEMSELVES WHEN USING THE PRACTICE ADVISORY SERVICE

REALITY: We have measures in place to preserve the anonymity of members when they call. RDs can call or email the College without identifying themselves if they wish. We do not ask callers to say who they are, unless we need to get back to them with additional information. RDs always retain the choice to not identify themselves.

If a member provides their name, they will have the opportunity to answer an anonymous satisfaction survey. We use the survey results to evaluate the effectiveness of the Practice Advisory Program, improve our services and to report on program activity to the College Council and in the annual report. Participation in the satisfaction survey is voluntary and members can choose

not to respond. We appreciate all member feedback, including suggestions for improvements.

MYTH: RDS CONTACTING THE SERVICE ARE 'FLAGGED' FOR PRACTICE ASSESSMENTS

REALITY: Some RDs believe that by contacting the PAS they will be automatically 'flagged' for peer and practice and competency assessments. This is not true. Our College believes that the best way to protect the public is to support RDs in their day-to-day practice. We encourage and welcome RDs to access the PAS for support and help. RDs can trust that we do not 'flag' users, nor do we refer users of PAS to the Quality Assurance (QA) Program for practice assessment. Participation in a peer and practice assessment is determined by the QA Program through a computerized random selection process.

MYTH: THE COLLEGE PROMISES COMPLETE ANONYMITY

REALITY: The College cannot promise complete anonymity if it receives information through the PAS program that a client may be at risk or that a member has or may engage in illegal, unethical or unprofessional behaviour. This applies especially when an RD expresses a concern that another RD acted in a way that compromised a client's safety. In such cases, the College has an obligation to investigate concerns that may involve incompetence or possible incapacity. The practice advisors will inform the member that the College may need to follow-up and take action on the information they have received. RDs have an ethical, and sometimes mandatory obligation to inform the College where a client may be at risk.

MYTH: THE PRACTICE ADVISORY SERVICE PROVIDES LEGAL ADVICE

REALITY: The College's practice advisors are not lawyers and are not in a position to provide legal advice. To address



specific legal matters, RDs are advised to consult with the legal counsel in their workplace or to obtain their own legal counsel, as applicable. The College will provide members with resources surrounding legal issues and, at times, we will consult with a lawyer to inform our responses to members, but we do not provide legal advice. Also, be aware that the practice advice given to one member applies to that specific inquiry and may not be applicable in other circumstances.

MYTH: PRACTICE ADVISORS PROVIDE CLINICAL PRACTICE ADVICE

REALITY: The practice advisors do not provide clinical practice advice but can connect you with resources and other RDs who may have expertise in a particular area of practice to assist you. Practice advisors focus on ethics, standards and the laws that affect RDs in their practice. They provide education and information to help members improve their knowledge and understanding of these laws and standards. They also support policy development and decision-making around professional and regulatory obligations for RDs in all practice areas including clinical care. We encourage RDs to contact the PAS by phone or email to obtain individualized practice advice. Knowing your questions and concerns also assists us in preparing relevant education materials for members.

MYTH: THE PRACTICE ADVISORY POLICES MEMBERS

REALITY: Our purpose is not to police members. We all benefit from the one-on-one conversations that take place between the practice advisors and our members. Members can be confident that the PAS is designed solely to educate and guide members in the application of the ethics, laws and professional practice standards for safe, client-centred nutrition care. For the College, these conversations result in a better understanding of trends in dietetics and the challenges that dietitians face in their workplace every day. This knowledge enable us to focus our resources on developing standards, policies and educational materials that are most relevant for the provision of safe dietetic practice.

MYTH: RDS MUST HAVE WELL-FORMED QUESTIONS WHEN USING THE PRACTICE ADVISORY SERVICE

REALITY: We receive a variety of practice inquiries from RDs. Sometimes members are not sure if their questions are important

or relevant and some RDs simply call to discuss issues that have come up in their dietetic practice. Be assured that regardless of your inquiry, we will address your concerns in a respectful and supportive manner.

MYTH: PRACTICE ADVISORY SERVICE INQUIRIES WILL BE ANSWERED THE DAY THEY ARE RECEIVED

REALITY: A practice advisor will review your inquiry and a response will generally be provided by email or phone within one to two business days. Response times may vary depending on call volumes and the nature of the inquiry. If appropriate, questions may be directed to another College department. A number of excellent practice resources are available on the College website, and the search feature makes finding information fast and simple. Visit www.collegeofdietitians.org

MYTH: THERE ARE RESTRICTIONS IN THE NUMBER OF TIMES AN RD CAN CONTACT THE PRACTICE ADVISORY SERVICE

REALITY: There are many RDs who regularly contact the PAS. We value our "frequent flyers" and would never restrict the number of times RDs may contact the College. We enjoy developing a rapport with RDs and appreciate hearing about how issues have been resolved. We encourage RDs to contact the College whenever questions or concerns arise. Since much of our correspondence is done over the phone or email, we enjoy putting a face to a name. If you see any of the College staff out and about within your workplace or at other education events, please don't hesitate to say hello and introduce yourself.

MYTH: ONLY RDS CAN USE THE PRACTICE ADVISORY SERVICE

REALITY: Anyone — RDs, employers, managers, interprofessional colleagues, clients and the public — can contact the PAS for confidential advice about dietetics and professional standards applicable to nutrition care. We welcome inquiries from individuals or as groups or teams. We also encourage dietetic interns and students to use the PAS to learn more about dietetic practice. Inquiries from different individuals and groups provide a broad perspective of emerging trends, insights, and issues related to dietetic practice.