Identifying & Managing Problems in RD Work Environments

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The foundation of the dietetic profession in all areas of dietetic practice is the delivery of client-centred services. This is articulated in the *Integrated Competencies for Dietetic Education and Practice*, the *Professional Misconduct Regulation* (1991) and the *Jurisprudence Handbook for Dietitians in Ontario*.

Client-centred services are linked to increased quality and safety, reduced costs to clients, and an improved client experience.[1] However, not all RD practice environments function in a perfect client-centred manner. Some RDs have identified situations in their dietetic practice that hinder (at least in-part) client-centred services. In these circumstances, RDs can be proactive in identifying problems and take a solution-focused approach to fostering client-centred values, behaviours and processes.

To assist in this process, the College has developed the following *Framework for Identifying & Managing Problems in RD Work Environments*. It outlines steps for problem identification and management that are applicable to all areas of dietetic practice.

Note: Clients may be individuals, groups, communities, populations, organizations, and/or the public at large.

Framework for Identifying & Managing Problems in RD Work Environments

STEP 1: IDENTIFY

a. Define the cause(s)/source(s) of the problem
b. Define the cause(s)/source(s) of the problem
c. Determine the key players involved

STEP 2: ANALYZE

a. Assess whether change is possible
b. Explore possible solution(s)
c. Highlight most viable solution(s)
d. Consult with stakeholders

STEP 3: RESPOND

a. Advocate for solution(s) implementation
b. Implement solution(s)

STEP 4: EVALUATE

a. Monitor & evaluate

It is important to follow all the steps to identify and analyse a problem. A solution may not work if it is impractical, if the resources aren't available, if people won't accept it or if the solution causes new problems.

STEP 1: IDENTIFY

a. Define the Problem

The first step in managing an issue is to determine that there is in fact a problem. RDs can examine what is going on in their workplace through reflective practice to identify or define the problem(s) that are arising. A focus on what is affecting an RD's ability to provide client-centred services should always be at the forefront.

Prepare a statement of the problem and find someone (e.g., colleague, supervisor, friend or family member) to review it and to talk it over for input.

Consider these questions when preparing your statement of the problem:

- What is the problem?
- Is it my problem? Someone else's?
- Is this the real problem, or merely a symptom of a larger one?
- Does the problem have ethical dimensions?

b. Define the cause(s)/source(s) of the problem

In addition to defining the problem itself, strive to identify the cause(s) or trigger(s) of the problem. Look at the current situation, rather than its history (as applicable).

Some potential causes of problems may include:

- People
  - Are there human resource shortages?
  - Are the skills of employees adequate?
  - Is there a lack of understanding in who does what within the team?
  - Are some employees perceived as not helpful?
- Resources
  - Are there enough resources (e.g., funding)?
  - Are some resources not identified?
  - Are some not used efficiently/effectively?
- Environment
  - Is the practice environment conducive to problem solving?
  - Is there a lot of stress?
  - Is the power structure (administration or line of authority) supportive?
  - Is the power structure (administration or line of authority) aware of the problem?
- Processes, procedures and rules
  - Are they understood, or badly defined?
  - Are they perceived as an obstacle?
- Communication & vocabulary/terminology/concepts
  - Is there effective communication within the practice environment?
  - Is there an agreed-upon vocabulary, and understanding of their meanings and definitions?
  - Are some "hidden"?

c. Determine the key player(s) involved

Who are the key players involved in the problem? Are they individuals, groups, the organization as a whole or external stakeholders? Also, it is important for RDs to take an honest look at their own potential impact on the problem.

STEP 2: ANALYZE

a. Assess whether change is possible

Identifying the problem, the causes and key players can help determine what challenges RDs can accept in their workplace versus what needs to change and how to effect changes to meet their professional obligations.

Ask whether problems can be solved alone or with others: would making a change in your practice, behaviour or attitude be sufficient; can a solution be worked out with clients; or should other team members be included in finding a solution. Also, ask whether the solution requires a systems change to optimize client-centred care. Does the problem need an immediate solution, or can it wait? What is the risk to the client or to the RD? Will the problem go away by itself? Can you risk ignoring it?

In some cases, the College's *Code of Ethics Interpretive Guide* may help in identifying and finding solutions.

b. Explore possible solution(s)

Examine the problem critically and explore different perspectives to find a new creative solution. Brainstorming alone or with others is an effective way to discover other viewpoints and new perspectives.

Ask what resources would help with creative problem-solving. Explore ways to get inspiration (e.g., evidence-based research, reaching out to RDs and other colleagues, etc.).

Find out if technology can help. Explore what conditions the solution must satisfy as well as the impact of solutions on the key players and the practice environment.

c. Highlight the most viable solution(s)

Having examined all the possible solutions, highlight the most viable options. Consider:

- **Suitability:** Is the solution ethical and/or practical? Does the solution have an adequate response considering the problem? Will others accept the proposed solution(s)?
- **Feasibility:** What resources are required (e.g., is it affordable?) How likely will the solution solve the problem? What efficiencies can be put in place?
- **Flexibility:** How are RDs and others able to respond to the solutions? Have unintended consequences been explored? Can the outcomes be controlled once the intended solution(s) have been implemented? RDs will need to consider their professional obligations to provide safe, client-centred care.

d. Consult with Stakeholders

It is critical to consult with all stakeholders in the process of choosing a solution to gain buy-in. Collaborating with others achieves greater success in implementing solutions.

It is important to consider all the criteria described above to find the most viable solution(s). A solution may not work if it is impractical, if the resources aren't available, if people won't accept it and/or if the solution causes new problems.

STEP 3: RESPOND

a. Advocate for solution(s) implementation

Once a solution is found, RDs may need to advocate for change. In advocacy efforts, focus on managing risks, giving value to clients, and the efficient and effective use of resources. In some cases, a cost-benefit analysis, statistics, evidence-based research or other relevant supporting information may be helpful.

Advocating for change will likely involve resource identification and allocation as well as timelines for implementing a solution. Putting a clear-cut plan in place will help in your advocacy efforts. You may also use storytelling techniques to inspire others about the changes.

b. Implement the solution(s)

Take the necessary steps to implement the best possible solution(s). Follow a step-by-step process, including timelines, for any actions and communications that need to occur. Informing people who will be affected by a change ahead of time will most likely lead to a more successful implementation of the solution.

Consider these questions in your planning:

- What must be done?
- Who will do it?
- How will the necessary actions be carried out?
- When will it be implemented?
- What will success look like and how will it be measured?

STEP 4: EVALUATE

a. Monitor & Evaluate

Monitoring and evaluating the implementation of the solution(s) are fundamental for any change management. The implementation will only be successful if RDs are monitoring the effects of the solution(s) on resources and stakeholders, timelines, and the progress. If results are not what were anticipated, it may be necessary to review the options and seek out alternative solution(s) to reach the goal of client-centred services.

To provide any feedback or raise questions or concerns related to this article, please feel free to contact the College's Practice Advisory Service:

416-598-1725 ext. 397
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1 College of Dietitians of Ontario. (2013). From the Client's Perspective, Spring 2013 *résumé* newsletter, p. 8. http://www.collegeofdietitians.org/Resources/Client-Centred-Services/Client-Centred/ClientPerspective.aspx

2 Study Guides and Strategies. (2011). *Problem Solving Series.* http://www.studygs.net/problem/problemsolvingv1.htm

3 Restructuring Associates Inc. (2008). *Problem Solving Overview, Six-Step Problem Solving Model.* http://www.yale.edu/bestpractices/resources/docs/problemsolvingmodel.pdf