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Leading UK Nutrition Association Urges Awareness Between Dietitians and Nutritionists

2012 is well and truly here! With New Year diets underway, the British Dietetic Association (BDA) is experiencing a significant increase in media calls asking for help to debunk various food claims from companies and therapists alike.

“It’s time to start 2012 with a clean slate and make it absolutely clear what the difference is between a dietitian and a nutritionist,” said Siân Burton, BDA Vice Chairman and Chairman of the BDA’s Communication and Marketing Board.

“In a nutshell anybody, overnight, can set up shop as a nutritionist, with no qualifications and no regulatory body to monitor how they work or what course of nutritional interventions they promote in their work.

“In comparison, UK dietitians are all science graduates who must be registered with the Health Professions Council (HPC) by law before we can practice. This legal registration assures the public that our professional training, clinical knowledge and practice is of the highest professional standard. The term ‘dietitian’ is legally protected and can’t be used unless registered with the HPC”A

The BDA has produced a comprehensive leaflet explaining the difference between a dietitian and nutritionist and members of the media and public can access it absolutely free of charge at <http://www.bda.uk.com/publications/dietitian-nutritionist2010.pdf>.

A summary of the stark differences includes:

	Dietitian	Nutritionist
Title protected by law?	Yes - only those registered with the statutory regulator, the Health Professions Council (HPC) can call themselves a Dietitian/ Registered Dietitian.	No. Anyone can call themselves a Nutritionist – and many an enthusiastic amateur does!
Minimum qualifications required?	Minimum requirement is BSc(Hons) Dietetics or related BSc(Hons) degree with post-graduate diploma/ MSc	None.
Minimum regulation and quality assurance?	<p>The HPC's is an independent, UK-wide health regulator whose role is to protect the public. Their register of health professionals – including dietitians – can be found at www.hpcheck.org.</p> <p>Registered professionals keep up to date through compulsory Continuing Professional Development (CPD).</p> <p>Individuals unhappy with their treatment or conduct by an HPC therapists can approach the HPC who will investigate and take action in a transparent and objective manner.</p>	<p>None.</p> <p>Voluntary membership of therapists organisations. Voluntary membership of CNHC.</p> <p>Self-styled nutritionists are advised by their membership organisations to ensure they have public indemnity insurance to protect them financially from client claims.</p> <p>There is no redress by law regarding poor or harmful health advice offered by a self-styled nutritionist to a client.</p>
Where they work?	Dietitians work in healthcare, the food industry, education and the media, where their extensive nutritional knowledge and skills are	Nutritionists work in all non-clinical settings. Some degree nutritionists from recognised university courses are employed within the NHS in hospital

	<p>appreciated.</p> <p>In hospitals, the usually work as integral members of a multi-disciplinary team to treat complex clinical conditions. They advise caterers to ensure the nutritional care of all clients in NHS and care settings, and may plan and implement public health programmes to promote health and prevent nutrition related disease. A key role is the education and training of other health and social care workers.</p>	<p>or community settings, working alongside dietitians.</p> <p>Nutritionists work with people who are well, without any known existing medical conditions, to prevent disease.</p> <p>Self-styled nutritionists are not legally allowed to work within the NHS.</p>
Treatments offered?	<p>Dietitians interpret the science of nutrition into practical advice and options for clients, patients, carers and colleagues. They advise and help to maintain nutritional status when clients want to follow alternative therapies e.g. diets for autism, exclusion diets. They must not offer advice based on subjective personal opinion or beliefs where there is clinical evidence to the contrary, nor must they take any financial inducement from their recommendations – such as taking a percentage of sales from a supplement company to whom they have referred their client for products. financial benefit.</p>	<p>A variety of practices, from evidence based to opinion, depending on the qualification (if any) of the nutritionist.</p>
Products they use?	<p>Dietitians are able to manage the whole system from advice and recommendation to a patient's access to all NHS</p>	<p>Any. Many recommend specific supplement companies as they may receive financial reward from the company to do so.</p>

	<p>approved borderline substances (ACBS) nutritional products and supplements, with or without prescription.</p> <p>Dietitians are able to clinically manage patients, for example i.e. ordering and adjusting dosages of nutritional supplements and in some cases medications directly on the patients drug chart.</p>	
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“There are major differences between a dietitian and a nutritionist and dietitians in the UK are very keen for these to become more widely known and understood by members of the public and, indeed, the media.

The British Dietetic Association, founded in 1936, is the professional association for registered dietitians in Great Britain and Northern Ireland. It is the nation’s largest organisation of food and nutrition professionals who are legally recognised and regulated.

The current situation with regards regulation of self-styled nutritionists is potentially harmful to the public. The CNHC, set up as a version of the HPC for nutritionists, has failed to attract sufficient membership given its voluntary status. Members of the public assume that a nutritionist is as qualified to advise as their GP or dentist is to treat them. This is not the case. The BDA call on the Government to abandon the CNHC and to regulate the practice of nutrition more effectively. In the meantime, the availability of enthusiastic amateurs dabbling in nutrition matters to a public keen for sound advice is of major concern.

“The BDA’s mantra is ***Trust a Dietitian to Know about Nutrition,***” Siân Burton concluded.

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