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## PRACTICAL APPLICATION

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### A Call to Sports Dietitians: Interview with Nanna Meyer

*Louise M. Burke*

Dietitians are a subgroup of the people who practice in the area of nutrition, with special expertise in nutritional assessment, counseling, menu planning, and clinical areas of nutrition (managing health and disease through diet). Many dietitians are eager to apply their nutrition expertise to sport and athletes. In some countries, sports nutrition has evolved from being an “interest area” for a dietitian to the status of a recognized “specialty” with registration/certification schemes and professional organizations dedicated to sports dietitians. An example of this is Sports Dietitians Australia (SDA), which developed from special interest groups of the national sports medicine organization and the national dietetic association. Information about sports dietitians in Australia and their work can be found at the SDA website, [www.sportsdietitians.com.au](http://www.sportsdietitians.com.au). In this article we interview sports dietitian Nanna Meyer about the newly formed Sports Dietetics USA (SD-USA) and plans to form an umbrella organization for professional groups of sports dietitians worldwide.

*Nanna, tell us about Sports Dietetics USA. When was it formed, and what activities is it planning to undertake?*

Sports Dietetics-USA (SD-USA) was approved in June 2004 by the American Dietetic Association (ADA) as a subunit of Sports, Cardiovascular and Wellness Nutritionists (SCAN), a dietetic practice group of the American Dietetic Association. Nancy DiMarco, PhD, RD, Professor, Nutrition and Food Sciences, Texas Woman’s University, was appointed as SD-USA’s Director. SD-USA was formed to promote nutrition practices that enhance lifelong health, fitness, and sport performance; and to advance the vocation of sports dietetics.

A high priority for SD-USA is attaining specialty certification for sports dietitians. There is a high demand for science-based information that integrates nutrition with fitness and performance—and the demand is rapidly increasing. Sports dietitians have unique skills and experience to assist individuals, teams, sport organizations, medical facilities, and wellness programs in meeting their goals. In today’s competitive marketplace, specialty certification would set sports dietitians apart from those who are less qualified. An online survey SCAN conducted in the spring of 2005 revealed great interest among its members in specialty certification.

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*So what's the timeline on this certification process and how can people who are interested get more information?*

The development of a board certification as a specialist in sports dietetics was approved by the Commission on Dietetics Registration (CDR), the credentialing agency for the ADA, in April 2005. The timeline from approval to implementation is anticipated to be 9 to 12 months. A practice analysis, eligibility requirements, and a specialty exam will be developed. SD-USA will assist CDR in this process as well as undertake other activities to promote sports dietetics. We will expand sports nutrition offerings on SCAN's website, contact colleges and universities that offer sports nutrition courses and programs, communicate with other sports and fitness organizations, and network with sports dietitians in the US and other nations concerning common goals and strategies to enhance sports nutrition education and knowledge, and the credentialing and marketability of sports dietitians. More information about SD-USA can be found at SCAN's website at [www.scandpg.org](http://www.scandpg.org).

*At the 2005 meeting of the American College of Sports Medicine in Nashville, a meeting of sports dietitians from various countries was held to discuss the formation of a global umbrella group for sports dietitians. What countries were represented? What was discussed?*

Our meeting had a truly international flavor with representatives from the US, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Argentina, Japan, South Africa, UK, Mexico, Norway, Costa Rica, Austria, and Greece. And this was without special organization prior to the meeting to advertise that we would be getting together! We discussed the advantages and opportunities to form a global body to link sports dietitians around the world—let's call it Sports Dietitians Worldwide for the moment—and share our experiences and special expertise. It was clear that people were interested in such a move, but we needed to do some work to develop a clear plan.

*One of the immediate outcomes from the meeting was a plan to survey professional organizations of sports dietitians around the world to identify their characteristics. This is a project that we are jointly undertaking. What sorts of information do we need to know from the groups in various countries?*

Before we can set up an organization, we need to understand how people become sports dietitians in different countries around the world. Our first interest is in countries where there is a defined career path and a professional structure behind the "sports dietitian" name. First, we want to know how people train to become dietitians in various countries. Second, we need to understand additional study or practical requirements that are needed before someone can officially practice as a sports dietitian. We are interested in understanding registration or certification schemes, and what sorts of continuing education programs or mentoring programs exist. We also want to find out the types of activities that professional bodies currently undertake or offer their members—for example, training opportunities, work registers, education courses for professionals or for athletes and coaches, and public commentaries. As well as identifying the current characteristics of the national organization, we want to hear their views about what an international alliance should look like—how membership would be organized, what goals and activities the body should set for itself. There are many ways in which we can assist

each other to grow and to share expertise. We can look at different models used to develop professional organizations in different countries, and see what challenges, mistakes, and successes have occurred along the way. We can also look for immediate opportunities for individual sports dietitians to benefit and learn from each other—for example, to identify education, practice, and mentoring opportunities that are available on an international basis.

*What about sports dietitians who come from countries where there is no official professional body to promote and regulate their special expertise?*

Of course, we recognize that many countries do not have an official system to accredit or train for such a specialization in dietetic practice. In these countries, however, some individual dietitians have been able to establish their own expertise and success in working with athletes. We also want to hear from these people, and their needs or ideas about what a global alliance of sports dietitians could offer. We also need to consider that some countries may wish to establish their own group or organization, even though the infrastructure for educational programs does not (yet) exist. We would like to get a sense from them whether distant learning, practicum opportunities, and mentoring schemes are needed and whether a global network should provide such programs.

*How do organizations or individuals make sure that they are included in this initial survey?*

Organizations and individuals from various countries can send their contact information to either one of us at the email addresses provided at the beginning of this article or they can alert us to their respective national organizations.

*What are the plans for the information that is collected?*

Once the information is collected, we will set the agenda for our next meeting at the International Sport Nutrition Safari in South Africa in September 2005. Representatives of several countries have agreed to participate in a 2-d seminar to discuss this worldwide organization and its further development.

*What sorts of issues do you think the information will raise?*

The most important issues will likely be related to how structured the organization should be, who its members will be, and how inclusive the organization will present itself regarding professionals in the field of nutrition and sport science who deviate from the traditional dietetic path due to the various structures of other countries' educational systems. This will inevitably raise the question of whether the organization should establish worldwide standards and scope of practice for sports dietitians. Further issues will pertain to the funding of the organization and potential sponsors, should the group try to operate beyond being an honorary association.