

Registration and Licensure of Nutrition Professionals in Florida¹

Linda B. Bobroff²

Before seeking nutrition advice, consumers need to be aware of who is qualified to practice nutrition or dietetics. Dietetics is a specialized field that allows persons completing their studies to take a national registration examination to become a registered dietitian (RD). The RD is a well-recognized credential, protected from use by unqualified practitioners. However, self-styled *nutritionists* or *nutrition counselors* often provide advice and counseling to those willing to pay for it. Unqualified practitioners can place their clients at risk for adverse health effects, and the public deserves to be protected from them.

Registration and licensure of nutrition professionals exist to protect the public from people who are not qualified to practice as nutrition professionals, just as licensure of physicians protects the public from people who are not qualified to practice medicine.

The following is information about dietetic registration (a national credential) and licensure (a state-specific license). Forty-six states have their own form of licensure or credentialing for nutrition professionals. Florida has three credentials that allow people to legally practice as a nutrition or dietetics professional: Registered Dietitian (RD), Licensed Dietitian/Nutritionist (LD/N), and Licensed Nutrition Counselor (LNC). Specific areas of practice, such as private consulting, public health, and long-term care, have different requirements.



Figure 1. In Florida, a Registered Dietitian (RD), Licensed Dietitian/Nutritionist (LD/N), and Licensed Nutrition Counselor (LNC) may provide nutrition counseling. Credits: <http://www.thinkstock.com>

Registered Dietitian (RD)

RDs study a required program of courses accredited by the Accreditation Council for Education in Nutrition and Dietetics (ACEND). They must earn at least a bachelor's degree and complete a minimum of 1,200 hours of supervised practice before qualifying to take the RD exam. Once they pass the exam and earn the RD credential, registered dietitians must earn at least 75 hours of continuing education units (CEUs) every five years, ensuring their continued expertise in nutrition. CEUs must be approved by the Commission on Dietetic Registration (CDR). Continuing

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2. Linda B. Bobroff, PhD, RD, LD/N, professor, Department of Family, Youth and Community Sciences, Florida Cooperative Extension Service, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, University of Florida, Gainesville, FL 32611.

education moves dietetics professionals beyond the entry-level knowledge and skills needed to pass the national registration exam. It ensures that professionals engage in a program of lifelong learning to remain competent in their field of practice. Because nutrition is an ever-changing field, this CEU requirement is critical.

The CDR is the authoritative body for dietetics registration (for more information about CDR, see its website: <http://www.cdrnet.org/>).

The CDR's certification programs are accredited by the National Commission for Certifying Agencies (<http://www.credentialingexcellence.org/ncca>), which is the accrediting arm of the National Organization for Competency Assurance (<http://www.credentialingexcellence.org/>).

Licensed Dietitian/Nutritionist (LD/N)

Licensing laws are statutes that explicitly define scopes of practice for professions. These laws protect the public by ensuring that only persons qualified in a particular field are allowed to practice in that field. Where such a law exists, it is illegal to perform as a professional in that field without first obtaining the appropriate license from the state.

Florida enacted its licensure law for the practice of nutrition and dietetics in 1988. According to Florida's licensure law: "No person may engage for remuneration in dietetics and nutrition practice or hold himself out as a practitioner of dietetics and nutrition practice unless a person is licensed in accordance with the provisions of ss. 468.501-468.518" (2012 Florida Statutes, http://www.leg.state.fl.us/Statutes/index.cfm?App_mode=Display_Statute&URL=0400-0499/0468/0468.html).

Licensed dietitian/nutritionists in Florida should use the designation LD/N. They may use the words *dietitian*, *licensed dietitian*, *nutritionist*, or *licensed nutritionist*, in connection with their name or place of business to indicate that they are licensed in Florida.

LD/Ns must meet academic and pre-professional practice criteria similar to those for RDs before they can take the state licensure examination. In addition, all licensed practitioners must complete at least 30 hours of continuing education within the 24-month period prior to the biennial renewal of their license. This is critical to ensure that the public will receive up-to-date and accurate information when they seek the services of an LD/N.



Figure 2. Continuing education requirements ensure that Registered Dietitians who counsel patients will be up-to-date in their field. Credits: Liquidlibrary, © Getty Images

According to CDR: "Dietetics practitioners are licensed by states to ensure that only qualified, trained professionals provide nutrition services or advice to individuals requiring or seeking nutrition care or information. Only state-licensed dietetics professionals can provide nutrition counseling. Non-licensed practitioners may be subject to prosecution for practicing without a license" (Commission on Dietetic Registration, accessed September 2012, <http://www.cdrnet.org/certifications/licensure/index.cfm>).

Information about licensure in Florida may be obtained from:

The Florida Department of Health
Dietetics and Nutrition Practice Council
4052 Bald Cypress Way
Tallahassee, FL 32399
Telephone: (850) 488-0595
Website: <http://www.doh.state.fl.us/mqa/dietetics/index.html>

Licensed Nutrition Counselor (LNC)

When the licensure law was enacted in Florida, individuals who had been practicing nutrition counseling prior to 1988 were allowed to apply for the designation *licensed nutrition counselor* (LNC). To indicate that they are licensed in Florida, LNCs may use the words *nutrition counselor*, *licensed nutrition counselor*, *nutritionist*, or *licensed*

nutritionist in connection with their names or places of business.

Prior to 1988, no law regulated the practice of nutrition counseling, so LNCs could have been highly qualified or completely unqualified in the area of nutrition/nutrition counseling. Individuals who choose to seek out the services of an LNC will need to inquire about his or her educational background and training to determine whether or not the person is qualified to practice. Whatever their background, LNCs must earn continuing education units to maintain their licenses to practice in Florida. Over the years, many have chosen not to maintain their licenses, and those persons are no longer allowed by law to practice nutrition counseling in the state.

Additional information about licensure in Florida, and the Dietetics and Nutrition Practice Council, may be obtained from the Florida Department of Health website at <http://www.doh.state.fl.us/mqa/dietetics/index.html>.