

# The Non-Traditional Dietitian's Role

*By Barbara Wakeen, MA, RD, LD, CCFP, CCHP*

**O**ver the last few years I have been working with dietetics students who are gaining 'shadowing' experience to gain acceptance to the dietetics' programs at the local universities. The students find the Corrections venue interesting and are enthusiastic to assist with menus, nutritional analyses, recipes and more. The venue is often one they hadn't thought of as an option.

In the recent past years, I had made arrangements with the local jails for shadowing as it became a popular venue for the students. As the ability to visit facilities has dwindled, I continued to get requests and arranged one-on-one shadowing in my home office. It is impressive to see their abilities and desires to 'jump in' to assist, rather than just observing.

Recently, I had the opportunity to speak at the University of Akron Student Dietetic Association meeting about non-traditional opportunities for dietitians....Corrections. Of course to those of us in Corrections, this is a normal venue!

I shared the history of my 24 year plus career in Corrections that was initiated by a court mandate, at a maximum security prison, and how my corporate contract management position serving multiple venues was eliminated at the end of the court mandate. The evolution that followed that was in contract management as the Corporate Dietitian for Corrections to my current role as a consultant specializing in Corrections. I highlighted the benefits of the corporate world, as well as that of being a consultant, and emphasized the importance of getting clinical, food service and other types of experience.

Registered Dietitians (RDs) and other related disciplines enter Corrections as a new venue all the time. I receive queries from RDs, Food Service and Medical personnel asking about issues related to nutrition, medical and religious diets, food preferences, service and food safety.

One of the most recent RD queries was if McDonalds twice a day was normal in a jail setting, or even acceptable. The facility was small and had no kitchen. We discussed desired nutrients and recommendations to ensure nutritional adequacy.

I communicated recently with a Health Services Administrator (HAS) regarding a grievance from an inmate on a vegan diet (that was being honored) as a lifestyle choice. The inmate submitted likes and dislikes then complained about receiving carrots (a dislike), beans (determined as pork'n beans) and wouldn't eat the oranges because they were seedless and contained GMOs! Communications with administration resulted in no lifestyle choices being honored. I must say, this is the first time I have seen a grievance about GMOs.

Corrections dietitians provide clinical services, managerial services, or both, as full and part-time employees, and as consultants for varying levels of government and private entities. We have to be knowledgeable of many disciplines and nutrition and food-related care, to meet the needs of our extended care population and governing agencies regulated within the Corrections.

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Watching the Grammy Awards Sunday evening, and the variety of acts, I was moved to think of how dietitians are similar to musicians. We all have our audience, our style, our area of expertise and our venue. If I can help an aspiring dietitian find *their* niche, that is rewarding indeed.

### Noteworthy News

Dietetics in Health Care Communities (DHCC) has a new EML for the Corrections Sub-Unit that is go-

ing live, but not before the completion of this article. To participate, one must be a DHCC member, which means a member of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics as well. To join visit [www.DHCCdpg.org](http://www.DHCCdpg.org) or contact Marlene Tutt at <lenetutt@yahoo.com>. Emails communicated through this group are sent through a private email address for DHCC members only. There are many member benefits including networking, publications and continuing education credits.

### Membership Information

If you would like to be added to the Dietitians in Corrections networking listserv, please email me directly at [bwakeen@neo.rr.com](mailto:bwakeen@neo.rr.com). This is an informal discussion group and your name/email address will be listed in each email sent to the group. You do not have to be a dietitian to be on the list.