Position Paper on the Role of the Food Service Dietitian

Definition of Food service
Food service is a multidimensional operation often described as a food service system model transforming inputs (human labor and skills, materials, facilities and operational) to outputs (meals, customer satisfaction, employee satisfaction and financial accountability). Food service is an increasingly complex context, which will always be in a process of change as new demands occur and vary from country to country. Food and meals for vulnerable groups must be nutritious (for prevention or treatment) and tailored for specific individuals and groups, as well as being tasty, tempting and familiar they must be safe, sustainable and financially reasonable.

Role of the Food Service Dietitian
Food Service Dietitians:

1. Play a key role in operations that provide meals for various target groups and settings e.g.: for the young in pre-schools and schools; for healthy adults in workplaces and prisons; for persons with disabilities, older adults and sick people in health and social care; as well as for staff and visitors in those settings. The clients who rely on this provision of food are often nutritionally vulnerable and they are partly or fully dependent on this provision to attain food and nutrition security.

2. Have a central role in initiating and formulating documents of visions, strategies, policies and guidelines for food service settings, based on steering documents from e.g. WHO, EU and member states. Moreover dietitians working in food service settings play a key role in transforming theory in those documents to practice in collaboration with interprofessional teams in everyday work.

3. Are uniquely qualified to provide food service for vulnerable groups, as their education and competences include: science and evidence based knowledge about food, nutrition and dietetics; organization and management of food service (financing, human resources and leadership); local governance and regulatory frameworks. All these aspects are balanced into decisions about how to plan, produce and serve meals that satisfy clients’ needs and preferences as well as reaching goals of efficiency and effectiveness.

4. Can play varied roles, e.g.: i) to consult; ii) to manage or iii) to direct the food service operations. Being consultants requires expertise in such diverse topics as menu planning, special diets, food safety, sustainability, purchasing & procurement and kitchen design and redesign as well as education and communication. Managers may require all the previous skills in addition to the responsibility of managing the food service operation. A director of food services will have an overall responsibility for several foodservice operations including all the responsibilities related to that role.

1 In Europe there are three defined specialist roles for a dietitian: clinical, public health and food service. Each role has its own competences.