**Chapter 1: Role of the Registered Dietitian Nutritionist in the Health Care System**

**Chapter Outline**

I. Introduction

II. The Registered Dietitian Nutritionist in Clinical Practice

A. The Role of the Registered Dietitian Nutritionist

B. Scope of Practice

C. The Clinical Nutrition Team

III. Other Health Professionals—Interdisciplinary Teams

IV. Health Care Services and Reimbursement for Medical Nutrition Therapy (MNT)

V. Developing Clinical Skills and Professional Performance

1. Specific Knowledge Base

2. Experience

3. Medical Problem Solving

4. Evidence-Based Dietetics Practice (EBP)

5. Problem Solving

6. Decision Making

7. Diagnostic Reasoning

8. Attitudes

A. Standards

B. Levels of Clinical Practice

VI. Conclusion

**Classroom Activities**

**Activity 1-1**

Items needed: None

Divide the class into four groups of students. Assign each group one of the following levels of health care:

* Preventive and Primary Health Care Services
* Secondary and Tertiary Care
* Restorative Care
* Long-Term Care

Explain that each group is to spend 10 minutes brainstorming a marketing technique to promote the services of a registered dietitian (RD) in their assigned level of health care. Instruct the students to focus on how the RD can help a health care system save money by utilizing the health care services. Have each group share their ideas with the rest of the class.

**Activity 1-2**

Items needed: None

Brainstorm, as a class, a list of possible questions that could be asked of each of the following health care team members to better understand the nutritional needs of your client (possible answers are in parentheses after each team member):

* Medical doctor (request changes in diet order or addition of nutrition supplements to current diet order)
* Nurses (any difficulties the patient might be having with food intake or whether the patient’s family or friends are bringing food in to the patient)
* Pharmacist (questions regarding the effects of medication on food intake, nutrient metabolism, or alternative therapies)
* Occupational therapist (availability of assistive devices to help patient feed self or prepare meals)
* Speech-language therapist (concerns regarding the patient’s chewing and swallowing abilities)
* Social worker (concerns regarding the patient’s ability to obtain food for himself or herself)
* Health educator (items covered during prior health education sessions that might need further reinforcement by the dietitian)

**Activity 1-3**

Items needed: None

Facilitate a class discussion on the need for health care reform in the United States. Use the following questions as potential areas of exploration:

* Who should be covered?
* How can coverage be increased to reach all people?
* What services should be included in basic health care packages?
* Should health care cover both acute problems and prevention?
* Who should pay for this coverage—consumers, employers, or government?
* Where will the government get the money to pay for it?
* How can health care costs be reduced or contained?

Be sure to explore the role of medical nutrition therapy in health care reform.

**Activity 1-4**

Items needed: Examples of current continuing education offerings for registered dietitians (listings are available at the American Dietetic Association website: [www.eatright.org](http://www.eatright.org))

Facilitate a class discussion about the role of continuing education for the professional development of a registered dietitian. Show examples of current continuing education offerings, describe how to meet the number of credits required within a certification cycle, and provide scenarios of how continuing education needs are identified during practice.