

COMPLIMENTARY WEBINAR PRESENTATION

Behind the Headlines:

Ethical and Socially Responsible Communications

Presented by **Kathleen Zelman, MPH, RDN, LD**



A yellow graphic shaped like a bottle, containing the text 'Earn 1 CPEU FREE!' in bold, black and blue letters. The background of the slide features various dairy products: a glass of milk, a bowl of cottage cheese, a bowl of ricotta cheese, a bowl of butter, and a bowl of soft cheese spread on a plate.

Kathleen Zelman, MPH, RDN, LD

Kathleen is a nationally recognized nutrition correspondent serving as the director of nutrition for WebMD Health, a contributing editor for Food and Nutrition Magazine and a nutrition expert for United Healthcare providing monthly webinars, articles, recipes and blogs. In 2016, she was awarded the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics 'Lenna Frances Cooper Memorial Award' in recognition of her distinguished career and remarkable contributions to the dietetics profession. She has extensive media experience and was awarded the 2007 Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics 'Media Excellence Award' for her contribution and commitment to educating consumers on the role of diet, health and nutrition issues through the media.

Disclosures



- ▶ Work for WebMD
- ▶ Consultant to United Healthcare
- ▶ Advisory Board: Total Health Initiative, Inc. and Sabra
- ▶ Health Professional Advisor to Egg Nutrition Center
- ▶ Member of Leaders Engaged in Advancing the Dialogue on Agriculture

Objectives Today

After completing this continuing education course, nutrition professionals should be able to:

1. Understand the mindset of today's consumers behind the headlines
2. Employ effective communication strategies that resonate with fact-resistant consumers
3. Complete a review of the professional code of ethics through case study analysis

All Practitioners Must Also Be Communicators



Rules of the Road

- ▶ RDNs have diverse roles and responsibilities
 - Yet every RDN professional needs to be an effective communicator
 - Need to stay abreast of the latest science
 - Translate the evidence for your audience
 - Loyalty to your employer
- And support and uphold the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics code of ethics

Benefits of Effective Communications

- ▶ Connecting with your audience
- ▶ Helps your message be heard above the noise of social media
- ▶ Enables you to tackle controversial topics, reach fact resistant people and deal with emotional hot buttons.



Communication Challenges

- ▶ Communicating in hashtags and 140 characters
- ▶ Page views & 'clicks' more important than content
- ▶ Age of short attention spans, information overload, instant access.
- ▶ Everyone has a megaphone > opinions mistaken for expertise
- ▶ Public perception \neq reality
 - No message is received in its pure form

Competing with Powerful Forces

- ▶ Food Babe
- ▶ Dr. Oz – green bean coffee extract, raspberry ketones
- ▶ Gweneth Paltrow, Goop
- ▶ Flip-flopping headlines
 - Coffee is bad for you, no wait, it's good for you, no wait...
- ▶ Misleading headlines

No Wonder Today's Consumer

- ▶ Confused, confused, confused
- ▶ Consumers are exposed to diverse ideas, concerns, and approaches to nutrition.

- ▶ We must be the voice of reason and earn their respect
- ▶ Bad advice has the potential to do harm.

Information Overload

- Bombarded more than 4,500 messages/day
- Overwhelmed
- Average person retains only 10%
- General audience has low science literacy
- Face myriad daily decisions
- Interest in health at an all time high



Today's Consumer: Anti-Science

- ▶ Defines healthy food by what it **does not contain**
 - For 1 / 3 of consumers, healthy food is defined, in part, by what it does not contain. (IFIC 2016 Survey)
- ▶ Fear of foods like fat, sugar, gluten, and GMOs
- ▶ Lack of understanding
- ▶ Misguided by strategic marketing and food labels – natural, clean, green
- ▶ Interested in animal welfare, ingredient use, production method, sustainability...



New Definition of 'Health'

- ▶ The age of social media brings “alternative facts”, “fake news”, and a wealth of misinformation that spreads like never before
- ▶ Extremist groups have been able to shape public opinion on hot topics.
- ▶ 1 / 3 of Americans have changed their opinion on added sugars and low-calorie sweeteners, primarily due to media headlines and articles.

Humans can't tell legitimate science from junk science

When you're confronted by some new information, how do you tell whether it's valid or not?

New Digital Health Consumer

- ▶ Rapidly adopting mobile – changing how they engage in health information
- ▶ More engaged than ever before with apps, trackers and mobile devices
 - Food and nutrition apps leading the pack
- ▶ Hungry for ‘digestible’ information
- ▶ Using smart phones at grocery store
 - 45% adults have smart phones and growing
- ▶ It’s all about ‘Sharing’, ‘Liking’



Consumers Want It All In Real Time

- ▶ Up until 10 years ago, 95% resources on the **“what”** of every story.
- ▶ Today, the **“what”** lost currency
- ▶ **“so what”** (why it matters) and the **“now what”** (where is it headed) is more important.
- ▶ Readers want an analysis, context and commentary delivered real time



What Consumers Want

- ▶ News you can use
- ▶ Actionable – small steps, improvement
- ▶ What they CAN do – positive messages are heard, guilt is not a motivator
- ▶ Want to know **‘how’**
- ▶ Want practical advice with few details
- ▶ Want it to be fun, ‘pleasure principle’
- ▶ Want it short and simple

- ▶ A REASON TO BELIEVE in you!



What Inspires Consumers

- ▶ Information delivered quickly, clearly and concisely: Pictures, videos, interactive platforms ON DEMAND
- ▶ Want to be entertained; interesting and relevant to them immediately > JUICY NUGGETS
- ▶ Experts who they can relate to – No preaching
- ▶ **‘Better is the New Perfect’**



We are the Credentialed Experts

- ▶ If we want to be the go-to instead of self-proclaimed experts with millions of followers
- ▶ Trust is earned by adhering to ethics code

- ▶ We need to let science be our guide
 - Preponderance of evidence
 - Dietary Guidelines Scientific Advisory Report
 - Beyond the abstract
 - Don't retweet unless you read the study

Your Personal Reputation is Everything

- ▶ Practice by the ethical code
- ▶ Integrity, credibility and trust
- ▶ What you say impacts you and RDNs in general
- ▶ If you call yourself an expert, you must behave as one

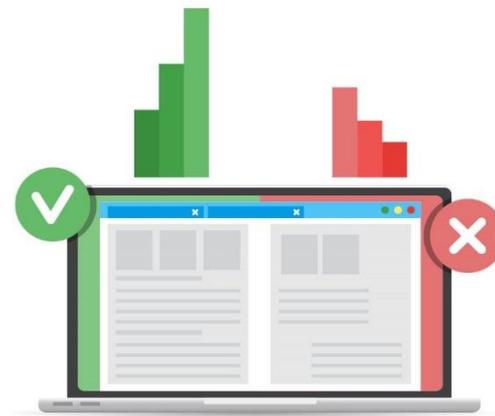
Translate Evidence Carefully

- ▶ Translate into everyday language.
- ▶ Clear, concise
- ▶ Don't push the limits
- ▶ Stay within scientific boundaries
- ▶ Know your audience
- ▶ FTC and FCC require full disclosure



Nutrition is More Complicated than Astrophysics

- ▶ Very little that is ‘black and white’, lots of grey areas within nutrition science
- ▶ 3 simple things to look for in a study:
 - Humans, the more the better – thousands
 - Time, the longer the better
 - Studies, the more the better



SPLIT TESTING

Communicate Persuasively

- ▶ Confidence, controlled passion and a well organized delivery
- ▶ Tell the whole story– both sides
- ▶ Make sure you know the details
- ▶ Become comfortable talking about controversial topics from a neutral POV
- ▶ Bring it back to FOOD, dietary patterns
- ▶ Practical application, key take aways

Power of The Right Word

- ▶ Choose words carefully
 - 'excellent' source
- ▶ Communicate so people understand
 - Translate science into meaningful messages
 - Executive summary
- ▶ Less is more – KISS
- ▶ 6th-8th grade reading level
- ▶ Applicable in all forms of media

Dealing With Fact Resistance

- ▶ Connect first, build trust, identify with their challenges – find common ground
 - I understand your concern, I'm also a parent....
- ▶ Goal is to leverage consumers' concern as a bridge to communicate advice
- ▶ Expertise, facts/science is not effective
 - Emotions drive consumer behavior
 - Rely on facts in a few words
 - 'does that make sense' 'want to hear more?'
 - Address family values, speak to the heart and help them feel in control
 - Focus on solutions

Potential Strategies

- ▶ Story telling
- ▶ Examples, analogies
- ▶ Engage – dialogue
- ▶ Visuals can be very effective
- ▶ Anticipate questions –
bridge back to key
messages



Principals of Ethics

- ▶ Honesty, integrity, fairness
- ▶ Professional boundaries
- ▶ Interpret science without personal bias
- ▶ Avoiding conflict of interest
- ▶ Applicable in all forms of marketing and communication
- ▶ Messaging and claims must be truthful and not misleading

Academy Code of Ethics

- ▶ Academy and CDR oversee the professional Code of Ethics. Applies to all members, credentialed and not, and non members.
- ▶ Guidance for professional practice and conduct:
- ▶ The code reflects the values and ethical principles guiding our profession and establishes commitments and obligations of practitioner to the public, clients, the profession, colleagues, and other professionals.
- ▶ The current Code of Ethics was approved on June 2, 2009, by the Board of Directors, House of Delegates, and CDR. Currently under review for an update.

19 Code Principles in 5 Categories

1. Fundamental Principles
2. Responsibilities to the public
3. Responsibilities to clients
4. Responsibilities to the profession
5. Responsibilities to colleagues and other professionals

Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics/Commission on Dietetic Registration Code of Ethics for the Profession of Dietetics and Process for Consideration of Ethics Issues. J Am Diet Assoc. 2009; 109: 1461-1467

Principles Related to Communications

- ▶ Principle 6: The dietetics practitioner does not engage in false or misleading practices or communications.
- ▶ Principle 12: The dietetics practitioner practices dietetics based on evidence-based principles and current information.
- ▶ Principle 15: The dietetics practitioner is alert to the occurrence of a real or potential conflict of interest and takes appropriate action whenever a conflict arises.
 - a. The dietetics practitioner makes full disclosure of any real or perceived conflict of interest.
 - b. When a conflict of interest cannot be resolved by disclosure, the dietetics practitioner takes such other action as may be necessary to eliminate the conflict, including recusal from an office, position, or practice situation.
- ▶ Principle 18: The dietetics practitioner does not invite, accept, or offer gifts, monetary incentives, or other considerations that affect or reasonably give an appearance of affecting his/her professional judgment.

Social Media has Transformed the Practice of Dietetics

- ▶ Helps RDNs reach broader audiences and connect directly with the public.
- ▶ Opened up new avenues of communications
- ▶ Effective tool for virtual nutrition counseling, patient education, peer-to-peer support and public health campaigns...
- ▶ Potential role is far reaching
- ▶ *There are important guidelines to follow related to ethics and professionalism*

When Opinions Differ From Facts

- ▶ Not everyone agrees with the science
- ▶ Identify your personal opinion – put into context
- ▶ Avoid wordsmithing/phrasing to twist interpretation
 - Cause and effect is not the same as an association
 - Correlation is not the same as causation
 - Hazard vs risk (exposure that determines risk of the hazard)
- ▶ Understand professional boundaries and ethics in all communication especially social media.

RDNs Not for Sale

- ▶ True transparency is more than disclosure, you must explain and defend your position
 - There must be a firewall between journalists and financial gain
- ▶ RDNs all bound by the same code of ethics, some interpret them differently
- ▶ Failure to disclose interests/financial relationships is a huge social media problem

Full Disclosure

- ▶ Mandated by FTC
 - disclosures must be clear and conspicuous
 - Required in social media, including Twitter
- ▶ Must always be transparent.
- ▶ RDs are advised to include #ad in paid posts, #sponsored if working with the company, #sponsoredtravel when they are attending an educational activity, and #client for a relationship.

Should you Disclose?



- ▶ FTC defines the benchmark for determining disclosure as:
- ▶ Do you have a "material" tie to the item you're promoting or recommending?
 - Any relationship with a company or brand that could affect the credibility of your advice
 - Material ties create a conflict of interest, meaning you either have the potential to gain from the promotion of that product or the consumer could perceive it that way.

Activities Requiring Disclosure

- ▶ **Spokesperson:** In all of your work, you should acknowledge this relationship with this company even if you are not being paid for a specific blog/FB post. The relationship has the potential to impact your work. Include in your blog that you are a spokesperson; #client or other relevant hashtags.
- ▶ **Free Samples:** Acknowledge they were free and disclose any relationship.
- ▶ **Speaker:** Mentioning brands/commodities/booth location are frowned upon but if you do, disclose the relationship and include on disclosure slide
- ▶ **Book Signing:** Disclose the support
- ▶ **Recipes:** Disclose if the products were provided.
- ▶ **Advisory Board Member:** Disclose if you receive financial support

Case Study: Vegan

- ▶ How do handle recommending foods you won't eat because of a religious/ethic or moral choice?
- ▶ Strategy: stay true to the science. Discuss health benefits of both.
- ▶ Rely on national guidelines whether you agree or disagree.
- ▶ Help meat eaters make better choices
 - Meatless Monday and plant proteins
 - Lean cuts of meat
- ▶ Put aside your bias and respond within code

Case Study: Non GMO

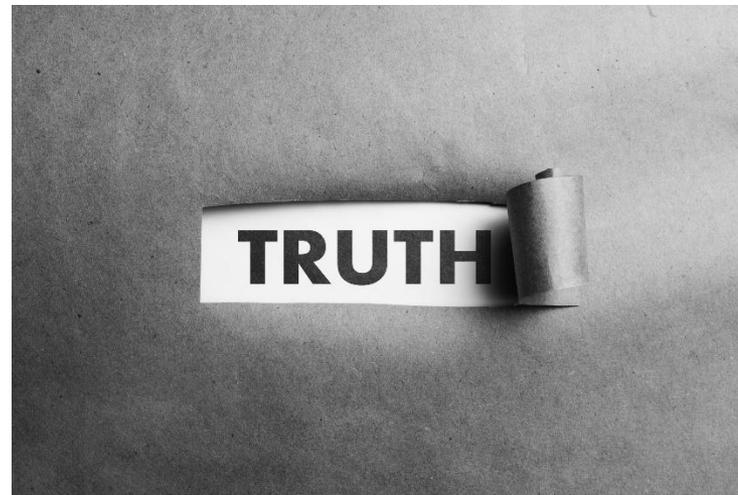
- ▶ RDN recommends non GMO
 - science-based practice vs values-based practice
- ▶ Where is the evidence? *2016 NAS ‘The Genetically Engineered Crops: Experiences and Prospects Report’*
 - “genetically engineered crops appear to be safe to eat and do not harm the environment”
- ▶ Put bias aside
- ▶ Develop talking points
- ▶ Provide options

Case Study: Milk

- ▶ RDN is concerned about antibiotics and hormones in cow's milk > recommends alternative beverages
- ▶ Facts:
 - Milk from cows taking antibiotics must be discarded
 - No steroid hormones are approved for production purposes in dairy cows.
 - All milk — conventional or organic — contains very small quantities of bST, and cows treated with rbST are within tiny variations of the natural bST hormone.
 - Like most proteins, bST and rbST break down into individual amino acids and peptides during digestion. Hormonal activity is destroyed, rendering bST and rbST biologically inactive in humans.

Case Study: Discovering Misinformation

- ▶ If you discover another RDN promoting myths/misinformation
- ▶ The code of ethics: responsibility to protect the public
- ▶ You must take steps to correct the misinformation



Do Your Homework

- ▶ Is there consistent, reliable science supporting a health benefit?
- ▶ Are there federal labeling regulations that apply to messaging?
- ▶ What is the nutrition profile of the products compared to others?
- ▶ What consumer insights do you have on the customer? Sales?
- ▶ Consult trusted sources, sales data, websites, government, Academy resources

Key Take-Aways

- ▶ Polishing and adapting your communication skills is critically important
- ▶ Translating science into ‘news you can use’
- ▶ Your Social IQ will help advance your career more than your education, experience and industry knowledge.
- ▶ Personal opinion can fly in the face of ethics. Use guidelines to guide communications and stay up to date!
- ▶ FULL DISCLOSURE



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