February 2015 Survey of GPs and Practice Nurses

DAA promotes APDs to GPs and Practice Nurses through various activities as part of the Healthcare Professionals (HCP) Program. To help assess the effectiveness of these activities, GPs and Practice Nurses were invited to participate in a survey, similar to research conducted in late 2008 just prior to the launch of the HCP Program. Results show that we have maintained our strong position over the past six years. They have also provided guidance for areas to focus on moving forward. One hundred and eighty GPs and Practice Nurses responded during March 2015 and key findings are outlined below.

Overall, the survey indicated that more than half (53%) of GPs and Practice Nurses are providing nutrition advice several times a day.

Almost all participants (99%) refer to a dietitian whereas 8% refer to a nutritionist demonstrating the strength of the title ‘dietitian’ among HCP. It is extremely unlikely that they refer to naturopaths (<1%). This finding is consistent with consumer research conducted by DAA (via annual Newspoll surveys n=1200), which also shows a preference for the term ‘dietitian’ (48%) over ‘nutritionist’ (33%).

More than half of HCPs surveyed (59%) were aware of the APD credential with similar levels of awareness among consumers (46%).

Most (92%) refer to dietitians in private practice, whereas 40% refer to community health centre based practitioners. Almost 5% refer specifically to weight loss centres and a further 10% to obesity clinics.

The top three medical conditions for referral were for overweight and obesity (95%), diabetes mellitus (97%) and then food intolerances or Coeliac disease (80%).

Most (92%) felt that dietitians were able to offer more comprehensive, individualised and specific diet advice than the GP or practice nurse would normally be able to provide. The responses indicated that specific nutritional management of chronic conditions, a personalised plan and specialist advice were the main reasons they refer to a dietitian instead of providing advice themselves.

From the GPs and nurses surveyed, we know that they tend to refer to dietitians who are co-located within their practice, who are listed within their practice software or whom they’ve had experience in dealing with. Word-of-mouth (60%) and a personal introduction (53%) are the most common means used by respondents to find and select a dietitian to refer to. Many HCP (30%) also use a general internet search rather than using ‘Find an APD’ on the DAA website (18%).

Although 59% of respondents were aware of the APD credential, only 33% are certain that the dietitian they refer to is an APD, while 39% assume they are an APD.
The top four barriers for referral to a dietitian identified were cost (49%), waiting times at community health/outpatient facilities (24%), inadequate feedback received from dietitians (20%) and an assumption that patients would not go and see a dietitian (28%). Close to half (49%) felt that a dietetic consult was an expensive service, yet 32% stated there was no reason not to refer to a dietitian. Respondents felt that referral would be further encouraged if dietitians kept GPs and nurses informed of the advice they were giving (68%) and 52% felt that a visit and explanation via personal contact by the dietitian would also encourage referrals.

Interestingly, 84% of the group knew that patients could receive a Medicare rebate for seeing and APD – we had expected this result would have been closer to 100% of participants and furthermore, only 26% use a Chronic Disease Management (formerly Enhanced Primary Care) Medicare items to refer to dietitians regularly.

**Key points for APDs to increase referrals:**

- Personal contact matters. Schedule a time to meet GPs and Practice Nurses in your area
- Keep referring GPs and nurses well informed of the advice provided to patients with regular feedback letters, beyond the requirements of Medicare and DVA
- Ask Practice Nurses to add you to their list of local dietitians in their practice software.

DAA has many resources available via [DINER](#), including letters of introduction and case studies, to assist APDs when establishing relationships with GPs and Practice Nurses.