

Feedback and Evaluation: A Guide to Fostering Competent Dietitians



Preceptoring is the role you take to train interns in the field of dietetic practice (Dietitians of Canada, 2006). It is likely that in your career as a dietitian, that you will be called upon to preceptor dietetic interns. Being a preceptor can be very challenging, yet very rewarding and requires you to have knowledge and skills in evaluation, especially in providing constructive feedback (Dietitians of Canada, 2006). Preceptors and dietetic interns can have several differences amongst them including ethnicity, gender, age, life experiences, problem-solving approaches and thought processes, and it is important that preceptors develop their relationship with dietetic interns by building respect and trust (Dietitians of Canada, 2006). Interns deserve a fair and comprehensive evaluation of their performance to improve their practices and prepare them for the dietetic world (Dietitians of Canada, 2006). Constructive feedback and evaluation help to identify skills and talents of the intern, and identify areas of growth that requires support to develop into a competent dietitian.

Key Concepts

Feedback: A continuous process that presents nonjudgmental information that can aid an intern in building a foundation of skills and knowledge. This should be done frequently, face-to-face, and provided in small doses (Wilkinson, 2013).

Constructive Feedback: Describing an area where there is room for improvement by utilizing communication that helps them comprehend and apply the information in the future. It does not focus on blame, specific and is directed towards a person's action. (Northwest Territories Human Resources, n.d.).

Evaluation: Formal judgment of how the intern has performed based on pre-established objectives that is completed after an established time frame (Wilkinson, 2013).

Integrated Competencies for Dietetic Education and Practice (ICDEP)

What are the Integrated Competencies for Dietetic Education and Practice (ICDEP)? The ICDEP provide a detailed list of the skills and competencies required for an entry-level dietitian to practice safely and effectively (PDEP, 2012).



The evaluation of competence includes:

Summative Assessment: Assessment of knowledge at the completion of an internship rotation (PDEP, 2012). The summative assessment ensures that the competencies are achieved (PDEP, 2012). This is often referred to as evaluation.

Formative Assessment: Ongoing assessment throughout an internship rotation to provide recommendations to interns on their performance (PDEP, 2012). This is often referred to as feedback.



It is important that preceptors have the ability to provide both formative assessment throughout the intern's placement and summative assessment using the ICDEP (Dietitians of Canada, 2006).

Tips For Giving Constructive Feedback

- Begin with an intern's self-assessment if appropriate (Ramani & Krackov, 2012)
- Give feedback in a private area (Zieber, 2005)
- Focus feedback on the behaviour rather than the person
- Provide specific examples of behaviour
- Describe rather than being judgemental
- Point out specific causes and effects (positive and negative consequences) of one's actions (Iowa State University, 2008)
- Make feedback timely and a regular occurrence (Ramani & Krackov, 2012)
- Base feedback on performance and situations that you have witnessed
- Emphasize the positive (Iowa State University, 2008)
- Confirm the intern's understanding of feedback
- Conclude with an action plan (Ramani & Krackov, 2012)

Tips For Language Use While Giving Feedback

- Avoid generalizations such as "all", "never" and "always"
- Own the feedback by using "I" statements
- Be specific, avoid general comments and clarify pronouns such as "it" and "that" (Lordley, 2004)

| Non-Constructive Feedback  | Constructive Feedback  |
|---|--|
| "Two weeks ago a food service worker told me that you weren't wearing a hairnet in the kitchen. Why would you do that?" | "I was just informed that you weren't wearing your hairnet so I came down to remind you of the importance of safe food handling practices." |
| "Being late is unacceptable!" | "I have noticed this week you have been 20 minutes late each day. It is important that we both arrive on time to utilize our time effectively. Are there any barriers to arriving on time that we can work through?" |
| "Why didn't you sanitize your hands before entering the patient's room?" | "I noticed that you didn't sanitize your hands prior to entering the patient's room. I want to remind you of the importance of this as we all play a role in stopping the spread of germs throughout the hospital." |
| "You're really bad at charting." | "I reviewed your chart notes and noticed that you are leaving out very important information about patients such as their height and weight. It is important to include this information for our future reference." |

6 Steps For Giving Constructive Feedback

Step 1: State the purpose of your feedback

Describe the purpose of the feedback. Discuss what you will cover and why it is important. If the intern requested feedback, use a focusing statement to ensure that you direct your feedback toward what they need.

Example: "I want to discuss..."



Step 2: Describe specifically what you have observed

Describe a certain event or action related to the intern's performance. State when and where it happened, who was involved, and what the results were. Only describe what you personally observed and don't speak for others.

Example: "This morning when you were counselling Mr.Banks, I noticed that..."

Step 3: Describe your reaction

Describe the consequences of the intern's actions or behaviours. Give examples of how you and others are affected. This will help the intern understand the impact their actions on others within the organization.

Example: "Mr.Banks looked uncomfortable that you were discussing his weight changes with him in the hallway, it would have been more appropriate to discuss this in a private space."

Step 4: Give the intern an opportunity to respond

Give the intern an opportunity to process the information provided. If they do not respond, ask an open ended question to solicit a response.

Example: "What is your view of this situation?"

Step 5: Be specific with your suggestions

Make your suggestions helpful by including practical and actionable tips.

Example: "Daniel, I find it helpful to spend 15 minutes every morning prioritizing my responsibilities for the day."

Step 6: Summarize and provide support

Review the major points you have discussed, with a focus on positive notes and areas to work on and improve in the future. End by communicating confidence in the intern's capacity to perform well in future situations.

Example: "As we have discussed, it is very important for you to chart all recommendations provided to the patient. This information is essential for other health professionals who are involved in the patient's care. Your charting skills have improved greatly since beginning this rotation, I have no doubt that you will include all necessary information in the future." (Cabrillo College, n.d.)





“During my internship I was provided with constructive feedback on a daily basis which allowed for continuous improvement during my placements. Establishing goals and expectations at the beginning of each rotation fostered a supportive learning environment.” - Rachael Thomson RD

“It is crucial that dietitians provide our dietetic interns with constructive feedback. I feel its our responsibility to the profession to ensure those that we “sign-off” on will be an asset to the dietetic profession in the future and part of that is ensuring that we provide constructive feedback for them to reflect upon.” - Bev Harris RD CDE



12 Tips For New Preceptors

1. Prepare yourself and your team before an intern arrives. Remember that evaluation, feedback and debriefing take quality time and attention.
2. Consider confidentiality around interns. Preceptors often only think about patient confidentiality but evaluations of interns should be kept private as well.
3. Keep your expectations reasonable when performing evaluations of interns. Your role is to train entry level dietitians not experts.
4. Set clear expectations in the beginning to avoid later confusion and frustration by both intern and preceptor.
5. Treat interns as equals, they will be your colleagues in a matter of months or weeks.
6. Be open to feedback as a preceptor.
7. Take time on the first day to get to know your intern and share your own experiences, this will help the whole rotation go smoother.
8. Anyone, in any job, may feel frustrated or defeated on a given day – let the intern know it is okay!
9. Use your resources. There are many colleagues that you can reach out to for support or advice when struggling with providing feedback to interns.
10. Positive feedback is just as important as constructive feedback to build a confident and competent dietitian.
11. Provide honest feedback – students appreciate this.
12. When evaluating an intern, acknowledge that people learn in different ways, which may not be the way that you like to learn.

(University of British Columbia Faculty of Land & Food Systems, 2014a,b)

Understanding The Intern Perspective

The current generation of interns bears many daily stressors, such as financial constraints, poor living situations, taking care of children and working while attending school full-time or completing internship (Lordly & MacLellan, 2008). Preceptors should be cognisant of the stressors in their intern's life as this can drastically affect performance and academic outcomes (Lordly & MacLellan, 2008).

Dietetic internship programs are demanding and can be stressful for students, some coping better than others. As financial strain during internship is very common a preceptor should not view students working part-time as less committed to learning (Lordly & MacLellan, 2008). In the past, some students have felt that they are negatively evaluated if they must work during internship.

Students understand that evaluations and feedback are important, but the process is often less than optimal. One student noted, "Our [internship] director repeatedly gives negative feedback to all of us – never highlighting strengths or fostering encouragement." (Lordly & MacLellan, 2008, p.128). When formally evaluating students it is important to be supportive and understanding. Conducting weekly evaluations for interns may be preferable to daily evaluations as this can cause daily stress that may interfere with learning.

Speak with your intern at the beginning of their rotation to determine their preferred evaluation schedule. Students should also be provided with the opportunity to evaluate their preceptors (Lordly & MacLellan, 2008), preferably before the end of a rotation so any necessary adjustments can be made.



Recommended Resources

Dietitians of Canada. (2009). *Are you an excellent preceptor? Focus on feedback*. Retrieved from http://www.dietitians.ca/login.aspx?ReturnUrl=%2fDownloads%2fMembers-Only%2fAre_You_An_Excellent_Preceptor.aspx (Dietitians of Canada membership required)

University of British Columbia Faculty of Land & Food Systems. (2014a, Aug 26). *The dietitian perspective: What makes a successful preceptor?* Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fe4CaK5Lbv4>

University of British Columbia Faculty of Land & Food Systems. (2014b, Aug 26). *The intern perspective: What makes a successful preceptor?* Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=phM82blGcuU>