

Employment and education experience of dietetic graduates from 2015-2020

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Introduction: Canadian dietetic educators have been calling for workforce planning and reporting. Information on career paths and program satisfaction of dietetic graduates can identify trends and emerging practice areas, support recruitment, enhance education, training and continuing education programs, and inform advocacy.

Objectives: Graduates qualified to write the Canadian Dietetic Registration Exam or be licenced by the Ordre professionnel des diététistes du Québec from 2015-2020 were surveyed to describe: 1) employment paths; 2) their first and current dietitian positions; 3) satisfaction with dietetic education and training; and, 4) perceived impacts of COVID-19 on employment.

Methods: A web-based survey was developed, piloted in 2019, updated to reflect national programming, the impact of COVID-19, and translated into French. Respondents were recruited via Canadian training programs, social media, and Dietitians of Canada newsletters from June-October 2020. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics.

Results: Of the 624 respondents, 76% were employed as dietitians at the time of the survey and most (75%) had obtained employment as a dietitian within 12 months following training completion. The top roles for first dietitian positions were acute care hospital/in-patient (36%), long-term care (15%), and health care teams (11%). In addition, 26% had secondary dietitian positions with a different employer. The average length of first dietitian positions was 14 months; however, 29% changed primary positions within the first 12 months following dietetic training. In total, 71% were satisfied/very satisfied with their academic and practicum training. Areas with lower satisfaction included cultural competence and financial management. Most respondents felt they had knowledge and skills (89%) and opportunity (78%) to advance their dietetic career. COVID-19 affected the employment search of 34% and current employment of 44% of respondents.

Conclusions: Survey results indicate a positive outlook for new dietitian graduates. However, COVID-19 profoundly affected many recent graduates. While graduates expressed overall satisfaction with their dietetic training, more in-depth training in cultural competence and financial/business skills would be valued.

Significance: The findings have importance for recent graduates, students considering entering dietetics, educators and employers. Data from this survey provides opportunity for comparison between regions and may serve as a baseline for future surveys.

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