



Position Statement on the Sale, Endorsement and Recommendation of Products

Introduction

Dietitians¹ in all practice areas encounter opportunities to refer to specific products and therefore influence their clients' purchasing decisions. Dietitians are accountable to conduct themselves ethically and competently at all times. When a dietitian sells, endorses or recommends a product or product line, it may be viewed as a conflict of interest. This document outlines the position of the Nova Scotia Dietetic Association (NSDA) with respect to the sale, endorsement and recommendation of products and product lines.

Key Considerations

Conflict of Interest

A conflict of interest occurs when, in the mind of a reasonable person, a dietitian has a personal interest that could improperly influence their professional judgment (Steinecke and CDO, 2015). This may undermine the integrity of the dietitian or the profession resulting in loss of public trust. A conflict of interest may arise in a transaction that involves a dietitian, a dietitian's family, or a corporation owned by the dietitian or a member of their family.

Clear Evidence

Dietitians must provide nutrition advice and guidance that is current, based on best practices and is evidence-informed. Evidence must be of sufficient quality to justify the advice/guidance. Where there is insufficient quality evidence of the efficacy or safety of a product or product line, dietitians are expected to disclose the issues and not to misrepresent the product or product line by creating a false impression.

Professional Image

Dietitians have a responsibility to maintain a level of personal and professional conduct that upholds the integrity of the dietetics profession. Dietitians are expected to refrain from acts that reflect poorly on the profession. Selling or endorsing products or product lines may negatively affect the credibility of the profession.

¹ The title of *dietitian* is used throughout the document, and means an NSDA member who refers to them self with either of the profession's protected titles, *dietitian* or *nutritionist*.

Professional Scope and Accountability

Dietitians are responsible to maintain current knowledge and skills, and to practice within their scope of practice and areas of personal competence. Where dietitians are not clear on the efficacy of a product or product line, they are expected to disclose their lack of knowledge to the client, potential client or relevant others. Dietitians must recognize and accept accountability for their actions and omissions, and for the benefit and risks to the client. Dietitians cannot delegate this accountability to another individual.

Definitions

Endorsement

Refers to the act of promoting or recommending a product or product line in *exchange for financial or personal gain*.

Examples

- A dietitian agrees to appear in an advertisement for a specific product line because it will advance his career and he will receive public recognition
- A dietitian placing a sponsor's logo on her website in exchange for a discount on the purchase of the product line
- A dietitian sampling a product or product line in a grocery store in exchange for a substantial gift from the grocery store
- A dietitian receiving corporate sponsorship at a conference to promote a specific product

Recommendation

Refers to the act of making a suggestion or providing advice regarding the use of a specific product or product line.

Examples:

- Recommending a specific product to a client during a grocery store tour but not receiving personal or financial gain for the recommendation
- Recommending a specific product during an individual consultation or group presentation but not receiving personal or financial gain for the recommendation
- Writing an article recommending a specific product but not receiving personal or financial gain for the recommendation

Sale/Selling

Refers to the exchange of a product for monetary value or equivalent. A dietitian's professional services are not included in this definition.

Position Statement

It is NSDA's position that dietitians must be honest, transparent, objective, and use an evidence-based approach when recommending, selling or endorsing products or product lines. Dietitians must not recommend, sell or endorse products or product lines that are unnecessary or where the product's efficacy or safety is not supported by quality evidence-based research. This position statement is relevant to dietitians when they recommend, sell or endorse products in associated with their title, and also in their personal lives when not using their professional title.

Transparency is of utmost importance to maintaining both public trust and the integrity of the profession. It is the dietitian's responsibility to disclose any perceived or actual conflict of interest at the first possible opportunity. Dietitians are expected to disclose to a client when a product is being sold for a profit, the client should be given options and reassured that service will not be compromised if the product is not purchased.

Where discussions about conflict of interest have occurred, it is essential that dietitians document these discussions and are prepared to verify information about a conflict of interest when called upon in the case of a potential complaint against their practice.

Furthermore, dietitians shall not use professional titles and/or initials or make reference to being a member of the dietetics profession with respect to any product that does not relate to the provision of dietetics services.

When recommending, selling or endorsing a product or product line, the dietitian:

- Discloses, in advance, any potential conflicts of interest
- Discloses, in advance, any industry relationships that exist between the dietitian and the product or product line being recommended
- Provides objective, evidence-based information about the product or product line
- Does not misrepresent the product or product line where evidence is lacking
- Offers the client at least one alternative choice to a specific product or product line
- Provides education to clients about factors to consider when selecting a product or product line
- Demonstrates a thorough knowledge of the product or product line including (where applicable) indications, contraindications, interactions, side effects or adverse effects
- When indicated, demonstrates an in-depth knowledge of the client's medical history and current disease states/processes
- Assures the client that their selection of an alternate product will not adversely affect the nutrition services provided by the dietitian
- Does not guarantee the success of any product or product line or imply unjustified expectations about the results which the client may achieve by using the product or product line

- Does not recommend or sell supplements unless dietary approaches do not meet the nutritional needs of a client or unless a nutrition policy recommends so (e.g., folic acid for women of child bearing age, vitamin D for older adults).
- Where appropriate, establishes a suitable follow up plan
- Where appropriate, documents all recommendations/sales

Recommended Reading

Steinecke, R. & College of Dietitians of Ontario (2015). *The Jurisprudence Handbook for Dietitians in Ontario*. Chapter 9 (pg 100).

[Nova Scotia Code of Ethics for Professional Dietitians](#) (2007)

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