

Michelle Cardel, PhD, RD



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Our spotlight member for this edition is Michelle Cardel, PhD, RD. Dr. Cardel is a post-doctoral fellow and registered dietitian at the University of Colorado Anschutz Medical Campus. In her current position, she spends about 90% of her time conducting research in pediatric obesity and 10% of her time seeing patients for weight management. As a post-doctoral fellow, Dr. Cardel is crossing the bridge between her professional training and becoming an independent scientist. Read below to learn how her personal desire to help others led her to choose a career in pediatric obesity research.

Dr. Cardel, please tell us about your background. How did you get to where you are now?

Growing up, a teacher shared with me Winston Churchill's famous quote, *"We make a living by what we get, we make a life by what we give."* Not until I was an adult did I begin to understand what this adage truly meant and have since strived to live by those words both personally and professionally. The world of childhood obesity and health disparities research allows me to make a living doing work I am passionate about, while also providing me the opportunity to help others. Each morning I show up to work and know that today is not about padding my resume or getting a pat on the back. The reason I do what I do is simple: I want to improve the health and quality of life of others in this world, and I believe I can make a difference. The training that I have completed to be able to do this work is a bachelor's of science in Biology with a minor in Chemistry, a master's of science degree in Clinical Nutrition, a doctorate in Nutritional Sciences, and I became a registered dietitian. I am grateful to be part of such a dynamic and impactful field.

Could you please summarize your current research for us?

In my post-doctoral fellowship, I have utilized my research and clinical background in order to participate in collaborative and multidisciplinary translational clinical research. My training has focused on the development, implementation, and evaluation of community-based, family-centered obesity prevention and treatment in diverse children and their families. Additionally, I am the principal investigator on a pilot study investigating the effect of social status condition on acute energy intakes and eating behavior in Hispanic adolescents. The culmination of the above research program may have public health implications for creating cost effective programs that use evidence-based practices to target psychosocial variables to produce sustainable, long term weight loss in children and families of diverse populations. My combined research efforts has contributed to my long term goal of developing meaningful and sustainable community based interventions to improve obesity-related outcomes in underserved populations.

How did you become involved/interested in your current line of research?

As a registered dietitian and longtime hospice volunteer, I have seen many of my patients, particularly those from underserved communities, suffer from weight-related medical conditions such as hypertension, diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and stroke. To me, it became abundantly clear that we needed to start preventing the development of obesity early in life to decrease the risk of developing these adverse body weight-related diseases. That is why I have focused my research career on understanding the etiology of pediatric obesity.

Dr. Cardel, what advice would you give to a young researcher for developing a successful line of research?

Review the literature. Find a field of interest that you are really passionate about. You are going to need that passion to sustain you when you are in the middle of writing your 7th grant that year.

What are your career goals?

My professional goal is to become a successful independent researcher focused on the development of sustainable and effective weight management interventions in pediatric minority and low income populations. I also hope to serve as a liaison between the scientific community and the public, providing evidence based education and recommendations to the greater community.

How has your affiliation with the Academy impacted your career progression?

As someone who did not decide to become a registered dietitian until I was in the middle of my doctoral program, I believe I have a unique perspective on the Academy. The Academy has impacted my career by providing me with clinical expertise and support that has only helped my research career. I think that my research background has helped to make me a better clinician, while my clinical work has greatly informed my research career...wins all around!

If someone were to ask you to explain why research is important to the field of dietetics, what would you say?

I would say that without the research, you wouldn't have a field of dietetics. It is the very foundation of the dietetics field.