

Member Spotlight

Wahida Karmally



Written by Erin Gaffney-Stomberg MS, RD,
Doctoral Candidate

Wahida Karmally, Dr.PH, RD, CDE, CLS, is currently an Associate Research Scientist, Lecturer in Dentistry and Director of Nutrition in the Bionutrition Research Core at the Irving Institute of Clinical and Translational Research of Columbia University in New York. Her career path has spanned three different countries and includes experience at almost every level of nutrition research; basic, clinical and public health. Dr. Karmally is a strong advocate of nutrition research and attributes much of her own success to the very dedicated teachers and outstanding researchers she has had the opportunity to work with.

I received my MS degree in Foods and Nutrition from the Women's College, Madras University, India. The degree requirements included a thesis on research done over a year. My thesis was on the "Bioavailability of Iron From Three Green Leafy Vegetables" which was conducted in albino rats and funded through a Fulbright grant awarded to my professor. This was a very rewarding research experience because of all the opportunities presented to me while I was establishing the methodology for my thesis. Because I was the class valedictorian, my parents rewarded me with an opportunity to study in the UK. I wanted to gain clinical experience and become a registered dietitian so I applied and was admitted to Queen Elizabeth College (later renamed King's College) in London. In addition to the course work, I completed a 6 month internship which included rotations in most of the teaching hospitals in London. Before I returned to India, Middlesex Hospital offered me a position to work in

their research unit. Studies conducted in the metabolic research unit included "The Effect of Fat Mobilizing Substance (FMS isolated from the urine of starving mares) in Obese Subjects" and "The Effect of Liquorice on Blood Pressure."

On my return to India, I was offered a position advising and teaching Advanced Nutrition to graduate students. Because vitamin A deficiency and night blindness were prevalent in India, one of my students conducted a randomized study on the effect of a "multipurpose food" on dark adaptation and serum vitamin A levels in a boys' orphanage. We discovered that the poor response to this supplemental food was attributed to the worms in the boys' digestive tracts!

In 1971, I moved to the U.S. and started off as a clinical nutritionist at the Mount Sinai Medical Center in New York. As soon as I got an opportunity to work with clinicians who also did research, I moved to those departments. I was co-investigator for a diabetes demonstration project and worked with obesity and lipid researchers, Dr. Fredda Ginsberg, Dr. Virgil Brown and Dr. Henry Ginsberg. In 1987 I was recruited by Dr. Henry Ginsberg (an Honorary Member of ADA) to run the bionutrition research core in the General Clinical Research Center (GCRC). I was able to obtain my doctorate in Public Health (Health Policy and Management) in the Mailman School of Public Health, Columbia University. Registered dietitians Dr. Judith Wylie-Rosett and Dr. Audrey Cross were my advisors and mentors. My dissertation

research was on "Cost-Effectiveness of Weight Loss Treatments in a Managed Care Setting."

In my current job as director of the Bionutrition Research Core, I work with other RDs and Dietetic Technicians, Registered (DTRs) to facilitate and implement the nutrition components of all CRC protocols. In this capacity, I had the opportunity to coordinate the multi-center landmark study "DELTA" and worked as co-investigator with Dr. Henry Ginsberg on several diet studies as well as with several other investigators who conducted protocols on energy homeostasis, osteoporosis, panic disorder, and lipoprotein metabolism studies in different diseases. In addition I educate professional and non-professional staff, study participants, medical residents, Duke fellows, medical students, dental students, graduate students from the Institute of Human Nutrition, dietetic interns from Teachers' College and the public. I am also a thesis advisor for students from the Institute of Human Nutrition.

At the Irving Institute for Clinical and Translational Research, I get an opportunity to work with research design, implementation, data collection and analysis for a variety of protocols. This makes my work exciting and challenging. I also collaborated with the National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute (NHLBI) on the Latino and African American Initiatives.

I am very interested in obesity and diabetes prevention. I initiated the anti-overweight campaign "Be Fit to Be'ne'Fit" at Columbia University Medical Center and the New York

Presbyterian Hospital with the support of Dr. Richard Deckelbaum, Director of Institute of Human Nutrition and an Honorary Member of ADA. We collected data on BMI and body fat in ~ 800 employees. In the bionutrition core we have an ongoing pilot study on leucine supplementation on body weight and cardiometabolic changes in addition to nutrition-related protocols on fever control in neuro-ICU patients; nutrition in ALS patients; in patients who had metabolic surgery; ketogenic diet as a treatment for mitochondrial disease, to name a few studies.

I was interested in research from my college days and I have been very lucky to have very dedicated teachers and opportunities to work with outstanding researchers like Dr. Henry Ginsberg and Dr. Virgil Brown. My current career goal is get more

involved with diabetes and obesity prevention and to be able to provide young nutrition professionals an opportunity to learn about research and think outside the “box.”

I have been inspired by several RDs in research. I have had an opportunity to work with outstanding RDs on the Evidence Analysis Library (EAL) projects on Disorders of Lipid Metabolism and chaired the expert committee until last year. I am on the Research Committee and the Evidence-Based Practice Committee and an Affiliate Delegate. I was an ADA spokesperson for 11 years. This was a unique opportunity to help translate research findings to the American people. Dr. Esther Myers, Director of Scientific Affairs is a wonderful resource in ADA.

The advice I would give to a young researcher looking to develop a successful line of research is that the

research process begins with ideas generated through a review of literature in the area of interest. These ideas lead to the development of research questions and hypotheses. Young researchers need to find mentors in their areas of interest.

Research is the backbone of our profession. Research gives credibility to the profession. Registered dietitians have the responsibility to make evidence-based diet and lifestyle recommendations to their patients, clients and fellow Americans. Nutrition research provides the tools for practice and provides an understanding of the role of diet in the prevention of disease and promotion of health. In 400 BC, Hippocrates said, “Food is Medicine and Medicine is Food.” In the past two decades, nutrition research has clearly demonstrated that diet is the cornerstone in the prevention and lowering of risk for several chronic diseases.

FNCE 2009 –

We invite you attend these Research DPG sponsored meetings. It will be great to see you in Denver and talk about ways to participate and become more involved with your DPG.

Function Name:	Research EC Mtg.
Facility:	Hyatt Regency Denver at Colorado Convention Center
Day, Date:	Saturday, October 17, 2009
Time:	12:00pm-3:30pm
Est. Attendance:	10
Room Assignment:	Capitol Ballroom 1
Room Set-Up:	Hollow Square

Function Name:	Research Member Breakfast
Facility:	Hyatt Regency Denver at Colorado Convention Center
Day, Date:	Monday, October 19, 2009
Time:	8:00-10:00am
Est. Attendance:	60
Room Assignment:	Mineral Hall A
Room Set-Up:	Crescent Rounds of 5 or 6