

DDPG Leadership Interviews:

Education, Career Path, Advice

Patricia Davidson, DCN, RDN, CDCES, LDN, FAND, CHSE

1) Where did you obtain your degree in dietetics and nutrition? Is there anything you'd like to share about your schooling experience and internship program?

Dr. Patricia Davidson did her undergraduate study with a focus on Nutrition and Food at Southern Illinois University. She obtained her master's degree in Nutrition and Food Science at Virginia Tech with a focus on community nutrition. She obtained her Doctor of Clinical Nutrition Degree from Rutgers University and did her clinical residency in vascular medicine at Overlook Medical Center. Her research focus and dissertation involved technology-enhanced diabetes self-management education and patient-centered care and self-management.

2) Can you discuss your career path as a dietitian?

Dr. Davidson worked in WIC and public health after she finished her graduate study. Then she got a chance to work as a registered dietitian in the endocrine practice, where she became involved in diabetes nutrition. It is noteworthy that no dietitians had been involved in this area at that time. Together with her mentor, two nurse practitioners, and an exercise specialist, they launched a diabetes education program which was one of the first diabetes education programs in the US. In 1986, she became a certified diabetes educator; part of the first cohort of diabetes educators (now diabetes care and education specialist). After working as a diabetes educator for several years, she moved to Israel and did biomedical laboratory research for 8 years. Then she came back to the United States and joined the vascular group, where she established a diabetes and nutrition care center as a part of the medical practice to improve the outcomes of patients with diabetes and vascular complications. While working in the vascular group, she discovered her interest in teaching. Hereafter, she was offered positions at New York University and Rutgers University to teach clinically focused classes including Medical Nutrition Therapy, Nutrition Assessment, and Nutrition Counseling.

3) How did you become interested in diabetes nutrition?

Working as a registered dietitian in the endocrine practice is the first time she became involved in diabetes nutrition. As she presented at ADA every year, she became more and more interested in diabetes research.

4) What is your current job position? Can you describe your job duties on a typical day?

Dr. Davidson currently teaches full-time at West Chester University in the Nutrition Department. She found this is the job that promotes her professional development. She also volunteers her time providing diabetes education to the underserved community, where she can keep up her clinical skills.

There are three main responsibilities for her teaching position:

Teaching. Dr. Davidson teaches four classes for both undergraduate and graduate students.

Research. Dr. Davidson's research focuses on the prevention and management of diabetes with the applications of technology. She emphasized that the individualized prevention and management strategies are tailored to a person's dietary needs, health conditions, cultural preferences, and health literacy. She recently started a focused education program to see if it can help improve hypoglycemia unawareness in older patients with Type 2 diabetes.

Service. Dr. Davidson is actively involved in diabetes care initiatives and services. She runs The Diabetes Prevention Program (DPP), which is a free service for faculty, staff, and the community at all levels of West Chester University. She is also in charge of the college diabetes network and awareness group aiming at improving the awareness of diabetes on the campus. She is the Chair-Elect of the DDPG and provides educational service at the national level.

5) What do you think the future looks like for RDN's in the diabetes nutrition field?

Dr. Davidson thinks dietitians are going to play a more and more important role in diabetes management as we have a better understanding of the relationships between nutrition, gut microbiome, and blood sugar control. Dietitians are required to stay up to date with the evidence and always be evidence-based when providing nutrition services. This is important for establishing our role and being an essential member of the diabetes care team.

Dr. Davidson also mentioned that the roles of dietitians can be broadened by changing the name of ADCES and the title of certified diabetes care and education specialist (CDCES).

6) What advice do you have for students and interns interested in pursuing a career in diabetes nutrition?

Get a mentor. Students should actively seize the opportunities to be involved in state dietetic associations or local networking groups for diabetes to interact with and get feedback from mentors.

Shadow dietitians or CDCES. Learning by shadowing professionals.

Stay involved in DPG. Using the standards of practice (SOP) and standards of professional performance (SOPP) as a guide to advance your career.