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By Maura Keller

Today's Dietitian's Third Annual Showcase of 10 Exceptional RDs Who Are Making a Difference.

Think about the people in your professional life who truly stand out above the rest. They may have inspired you to take your career more seriously, follow your professional dreams more closely, or perhaps they've mentored you, helping you become the incredible RD you are today. Or better yet, perhaps they've gone above and beyond to make a profound difference in the lives of their clients or community, overcome significant challenges in their career and risen to new heights of success, or achieved a high standard of excellence as a nutrition professional.

In March, to coincide with National Nutrition Month and Registered Dietitian Day, *Today's Dietitian* asked readers to nominate dedicated and deserving RDs who exhibit these attributes. We'd like to thank you for nominating your colleagues and giving them time in the spotlight.

This article features 10 individuals chosen for their exceptional accomplishments. Enjoy reading the following profiles and congratulate yourselves for the extraordinary work you do every day.

Beth Bernstein, MHA, RD

Director, Food & Nutrition Services, Kaiser Permanente

As the director of food and nutrition services at Kaiser Permanente in San Diego, Beth Bernstein is responsible for all the inpatient clinical and food services in the 392-bed hospital.

"We offer our patients a restaurant-style menu with home-made foods, which is monitored by our certified executive chef," Bernstein says. "With the more recent emphasis on patient satisfaction, over the past two years, we've changed our foods,

branded several items, and implemented many other innovative ideas to improve our patient satisfaction scores tremendously from last place [ranked among our sister hospitals] to first place while maintaining our low-cost structure."

Over the past couple of years, Bernstein and the department team, including staff and managers, have worked diligently to improve service to patients. "We've implemented boxed meals, improved employee communication with patients, provided gourmet snacks to postpartum patients, piloted the successful Nutrition Ambassador Program, revised our Emergency Preparedness Plan, and provided uninterrupted meal service to employees and staff during a multicounty 12-hour power outage. We also presented posters about our successful programs to an Annual Nursing Service Council Forum and at the Food & Nutrition Conference & Expo [FNCE], and in December 2011 we received an annual award for Leading and Living the KP YES Culture, a Kaiser San Diego leadership award for excellence and accomplishments."

Under Bernstein's leadership, the FANfare (Food and Nutrition-fare) program, a Nutrition Ambassador Program initiated to improve patient satisfaction, was recognized locally, regionally, and nationally for its success in providing exceptional services to patients and staff. Bernstein led her department to win the Don Miller and Associates Hospital Food Service Culture



Beth Bernstein

Change Award in 2011 and, in the same year, ranked first for polite and professional foodservice employees among the Kaiser Permanente Southern California region. “We were the first in polite and professional foodservice employees out of all Kaiser hospitals nationwide. Two years before, we were close to last place,” Bernstein says.

Bernstein became an RD because of her love for evidence-based science and how it can affect individuals’ health and healing. Although she started in the outpatient arena and provided medical nutrition therapy in the hospital, she found that by taking the step into management, she could have a greater impact on patients and in designing and implementing changes in food and nutrition.

Her creativity has led to numerous innovative hospital foodservice programs, which bolstered patient satisfaction scores so much that other facilities have since adopted her programs. “The areas I enjoy most are developing new and sometimes crazy ideas, programs, policies, and implementing them to see the results,” Bernstein says. “Thankfully, most are very successful. When it’s successful and other hospitals take the new idea and implement it too, that’s what is most rewarding.”

“In my organization, we’re encouraged to try new ideas with the understanding that some may fail,” Bernstein continues, “but having the freedom to make these educated and planned trials is what makes the job fun and rewarding.”

Luanne Hughes, MS, RD

**Family & Community Health Sciences Educator,
Rutgers Cooperative Extension of Gloucester**

As a teenager, Luanne Hughes knew she wanted to become an RD. “I saw so many friends and classmates struggle with weight and healthful eating,” says Hughes, who’s now an associate professor and Family & Community Health Sciences (FCHS) educator with the New Jersey Agricultural Experiment Station at Rutgers Cooperative Extension. “Most of us had no idea where to find good, reliable information. We had no ability to distinguish between fact and fiction. That’s why I developed an interest in nutrition. I knew that education and prevention were my calling after one of my best friends passed away at 19 from cardiac arrest associated with the damage that resulted from years of battling an eating disorder. I want to provide the consumers I touch with the knowledge and skills my friends and I never had: the ability to understand the role real food plays in our lives and how to live a healthier lifestyle.”

For Hughes, working in a position that offers a “little bit of everything” provides her variety while challenging both her creativity and gifted scientific mind.

“I’m the local community’s link to our experiment station and Rutgers University,” Hughes says. “I conduct applied research and develop and teach a variety of FCHS programs to adults and youth. I get to teach, write consumer and referred publications, create curricula and instructional materials,



Luanne Hughes

develop Web and social marketing materials, write grants, work with the media, and develop school and community nutrition initiatives. Most of my programs address community food systems and nutrition topics, with emphasis on school wellness, farm to school, youth farmstands and gardens, and family wellness.”

Aside from paperwork, Hughes says she loves everything about her role in the cooperative extension. “I get to work every day on projects that are my passion,” she says. “And I get to work with a tremendous group of people—coworkers, colleagues, collaborators, and youth/adults throughout the state.”

Currently, Hughes and her team are implementing a garden-enhanced school wellness initiative for kindergarten through sixth grade called Grow Healthy. “We’re working with schools—students, teachers, families, administrators, nurses, and school foodservice—to teach them about the interrelationship between nutrition, local food systems, physical activity, and healthful eating. In just a few short months, I’ve been part of a school wellness metamorphosis that’s opened so many people’s eyes to how easy it is to make small changes to improve nutrition and physical activity.”

Recently, one school participating in the Grow Healthy initiative told Hughes that it changed its menu to accommodate student requests for fresh baby spinach and kale because of what they’re learning in school. “Even better,” Hughes says, “are the parents who tell me that they had to start serving more vegetables at home because their kids liked it so much at school. It just doesn’t get any better than that!”

Janai Marie Meyer, RD, LD, CLC

**Community Dietitian II, Southeast Alaska Regional
Health Consortium**

Working throughout the villages and islands of southeast Alaska is a rewarding experience for Janai Marie Meyer, especially providing for the dietary needs of the native and nonnative people. Serving as a community dietitian for the Southeast Alaska Regional Health Consortium for nearly 16 years, Meyer manages health promotion staff on Prince of Wales Island, offers outpatient medical nutrition therapy, works on the diabetes team, provides WIC consulting, and works as a certified breast-feeding counselor and in the areas of community wellness, community gardens, subsistence food gathering, and preservation.

“At one point in my drive to finish college, I took a student



Janai Marie Meyer

assistant job with a wonderful RD at the University of Alaska, Anchorage, and she strongly encouraged me to pursue my RD and bring those skills home,” Meyer says. “At that time, Alaska didn’t offer the degree, so I had to return to the lower 48 states. I knew I wanted to bring the science, the evidence of sound and traditional nutrition for health and healing back to the people of Alaska. I’ve always been very passionate about representing the field and science of nutrition in a professional manner, especially with the overwhelming amount of fads and misinformation in the popular media.”

Meyer’s desire to get her RD license and return to her home of Alaska remains important to her after all these years, as she cherishes working with the Alaska Native people who practice traditional healing and other customs unique to their culture.

“I very much enjoy the closeness of the smaller, tight-knit communities,” Meyer says. “I also want to continue to support the people of Alaska in strengthening their rich and strong traditions of food gathering, preservation, and health, and I want to continue to encourage and support all women who wish to breast-feed.”

The joys of Meyer’s role also come with challenges. She travels quite a bit to remote villages via float, plane, or ferry through sometimes-treacherous weather conditions. And her travel schedule often infringes on the time she’d like to spend at home with her family. “The independence also can be a challenge, as I don’t have a local group of RD peers, though I do have some long-distance peers,” Meyers says. “But I strive to be seen as trustworthy, consistent, and as a solid and dependable person to all the people and communities I visit.”

Letty Holmbo, MBA, RD, LD Corporate Dietitian, HEB Grocery Stores

For Letty Holmbo, combining her gift of teaching and motivating others with her interest in food and cooking resulted in her attending the University of the Incarnate Word, and she subsequently completed her postgraduate dietetic internship at the Department of Public Health in Tempe, Arizona. She also earned her executive MBA at the University of Texas at San Antonio.

Today, Holmbo is the culinary corporate dietitian for HEB Grocery Stores in San Antonio, where she develops recipes for companywide marketing materials, such as the store magazine *My Texas Life*.

“I formulate and test cooking instructions and develop recipes for our own brand packaging,” Holmbo says. “I oversee corporate nutrition programs in partnership with the department of communications, and I’m the media contact for KENS 5 [a local TV station] for a monthly nutrition segment as well as



Letty Holmbo

themed vignettes. I oversee community nutrition outreach and assist in program development, and I provide nutrition consultation for the Autism Treatment Center.”

Holmbo enjoys providing practical information regarding health and wellness through grocery store tours, working as a personal chef, conducting consultations with shoppers, and leading cooking classes. She translates nutrition into realistic, practical steps for shoppers.

“I meet customers where they are and help them take one more step towards better health,” Holmbo says. “I adjust recipes that are difficult to follow [and turn them] into easy and delicious meals for the everyday cook. I partner with occupational therapists and serve as an advocate for the special needs community, particularly for children and adults with autism spectrum disorder.”

Holmbo enjoys the variety of responsibilities and finds it rewarding when customers tell her how much they enjoy her recipe ideas. “It’s great to work for a company that invests in the health of its employees,” Holmbo says. “I also have about 40 dietetic interns from around the state rotate through my office, and I enjoy mentoring them as they’re beginning their dietetic journey.” The interns develop and test recipes, teach classes, give grocery store tours, and participate in various projects. “They learn by doing, not following,” Holmbo says. “I share advice and answer questions while we cook together. Food always makes for great conversation.”

In addition to mentoring others in the field, Holmbo recognizes the importance of educating children early on about the importance of eating healthfully. That’s why she helped with the Kids in the Kitchen theme for the April’s Healthy at HEB, an initiative aimed at lowering the cost of healthful foods as well as increasing the availability of ingredients for special diets.

“We try to incorporate our theme into *My Texas Life* magazine,” Holmbo says. “Kids in the Kitchen is one way to encourage families to cook more, eat healthier, and work together as a family to get meals on and off the table in a timely manner.”

“I strive to tell my clients that feeling better can come as quickly as your next meal,” Holmbo says. “Value the importance of what you eat and what you feed your family.”

Peter Mak, RD Ambulatory Care Specialist Dietitian, San Francisco VA Medical Center

In 2003, Peter Mak served in the US Marine Corps infantry during Operation Iraqi Freedom I. Toward the end of its first deployment in Iraq, his unit spent time in Kuwait before returning to the United States.

“During that time, fellow Marines in our squad had followed my rudimentary eating plan and workout regimen [that had] no scientific basis. After a month had passed, some Marines had lost weight and, in general, felt better about themselves. It didn’t matter if an individual’s weight loss was a result of adherence

to my plan or the physical and mental stresses from combat. I was drawn to the positivity I felt by motivating others to improve their health by balancing dietary choices and exercise.”

After returning to the United States, Mak studied nutrition at the University of California (UC), Davis. It was his strong interest in understanding how to actively promote health and fitness along with a desire to give back and support others that lead him to a career as a dietitian. In 2009, after he graduated from his dietetic internship at UC Davis, the Nutrition Service at the San Francisco VA Medical Center hired him as an ambulatory care specialist dietitian where he specializes in the areas of oncology and morbid obesity/gastric bypass surgery. He also works at the community-based outpatient clinics in downtown San Francisco and Clear Lake County.

“It’s an honor to be able to serve veterans every day, ranging from the First World War to the young warriors returning from Iraq and Afghanistan,” Mak says. “I enjoy offering professional nutrition advice, backed by validated studies and ongoing scientific research, so that our veterans can make best-informed decisions. Reward and satisfaction comes from a handshake, a simple thank you, and the general sense that I’ve made even the slightest positive impact in their lives.”

Mak provides one-on-one counseling sessions for clients with chronic illnesses and education for patients receiving enteral nutrition and teaches small classes for general and surgical weight management.

He tells patients there’s no need to add extra stress to their everyday life by dwelling on what they can’t eat. “Instead, I help them focus on what they’re willing to do to improve their health by setting realistic, achievable goals that fit their schedule or lifestyle.”

Heidi Martin, MS, RD, LD, SNS

***Child Nutrition Coordinator,
Idaho Department of Education***

Growing up on a farm instilled a passion in Heidi Martin not only for agriculture but for nutrition and learning how the two go hand in hand. That’s why Martin’s role as a child nutrition coordinator for the Idaho Department of Education, where she leads the farm-to-school program for the State of Idaho, is a perfect fit.

“In this program, we partner with the Idaho Department of Agriculture to provide schools with technical assistance, training, and tools to serve fresh, local foods in school meals and to provide nutrition education about these healthful foods to



Peter Mak

students,” Martin says. “As part of this program, I provide education to school foodservice employees to teach them how to work with local farmers and purchase local foods that are in season. This program has been a huge success and isn’t only helping provide fresh, healthful foods that taste great to students, but it’s also supporting local agriculture and the local economy.”

Martin developed a variety of resources to support the education component of the Idaho Farm to School Program, including the My Idaho Plate (similar to the USDA’s MyPlate, only it focuses on foods from Idaho) and the Incredible Edible Idaho Food Posters, which illustrate the food growing in the field in its food form on a plate. She also developed nutrition facts, agriculture facts, and a map of Idaho showing where the food is grown. Martin established the Idaho Farm to School Curriculum Kit that provides a set of lesson plans, scripted PowerPoint presentations, classroom activities, and parent take-home sheets for each food grown in Idaho.

Furthermore, Martin works with school leaders throughout Idaho to develop district policies on school wellness. “As a result of these policies, we’ve seen several schools improve the types of foods they sell in school stores and vending machines or remove the vending/pop machines from the schools altogether.”

The most rewarding aspect for Martin is seeing young kids choose healthful foods and enjoy them. “The area that I work in—child nutrition programs—really has the opportunity to make a huge impact on the health and wellness of children and youth, especially since I work at a state level and have the opportunity to impact hundreds of schools around the state.”

Martin stresses that each RD has the potential to become a role model for healthful eating, keeping in mind that the younger generations are watching and learning from these nutrition professionals. “It’s not that hard to get young kids excited to eat healthful foods if you approach it with a positive attitude, make nutrition interesting, make healthful food taste good, and model those healthful choices yourself,” Martin says. “My hope is that the children and students our programs reach are taught at a young age to enjoy a variety of healthful foods so they can grow up to be healthy adults.”

Jennifer Ketterly, MS, RD, CSSD, LD

Director of Sports Nutrition, University of Georgia

Working as the director of sports nutrition within a new intercollegiate nutrition service at a Division 1 school would be challenging for anyone. But Jennifer Ketterly wholeheartedly embraces her administrative, clinical, education, and academic responsibilities.

In her administrative capacity, Ketterly leads the effort to build, implement, and integrate nutrition services for more than 700 student athletes. “I’m also a clinician covering teams and providing individual nutrition counseling related to the health and performance of the individual student athletes,” Ketterly says.



Heidi Martin

In addition to her individual counseling services, Ketterly's role requires her to provide a great deal of nutrition education and outreach to the University of Georgia's teams, coaches, and staff. "We offer team talks; cooking classes; print, electronic, and social media education; and hands-on, point-of-service nutrition education and intervention at meal times," Ketterly says. "As a sports RD at a large university, we also have the responsibility and opportunity to teach, instruct, supervise, and precept allied health students and take part in sports medicine and nutrition related research." For example, Ketterly currently is engaged in research examining the role of antioxidants in reducing muscle soreness, vitamin D and injury recovery, and more.



Jennifer Ketterly

When evaluating the dietetics field at the beginning of her career, Ketterly was enticed by the science and application of nutrition and how it could ultimately affect and alter one's health and athletic performance.

"Tracing back, I originally was attracted to the impact of nutrition during my high school days as a competitive basketball athlete," Ketterly says. "Learning that what you eat and how much you drink can give you more energy and how specific key nutrients are important to performance was fascinating. As a college athlete, being able to study these principles and learn the application of nutrition was a unique opportunity. I hope to educate and facilitate nutrition-related behavior change to help athlete's meet their health and performance goals while creating a positive, supportive nutrition culture within our athletic department."

Ketterly enjoys the uniqueness that each day brings to her position—interacting with the student athletes, the clinical challenges that interface with sports, and the opportunity to be creative in educating and building culture.

"Most rewarding is ultimately seeing an athlete grow, mature, and perform at his or her peak and knowing that nutrition played a role in that success," Ketterly says. "Nutrition is a long-term, evolving commitment; health is a long-term, defined outcome. If athletes commit to learning [about] their nutrition needs and are open to incorporating those needs, the rewards will be clear."

Jessica Setnick, MS, RD, CSSD, CEDRD

Owner, Understanding Nutrition

Owning her own business has allowed Jessica Setnick to create five distinct branches under the same umbrella of her company Understanding Nutrition.

Branch one is Setnick's private practice, where she meets with clients who battle eating disorders and helps them find their way to recovery. Branch two involves her role as education and training director of Ranch 2300, an eating disorders treatment program in Texas. "Part of [Branch two] is working on site

with the program in Lubbock, and part of it is traveling to educate professionals around the country about eating disorders and treatment," Setnick explains.

Branch three entails Setnick's role as a speaker on college campuses through the speaker's bureau CAMPUSPEAK. Branch four involves her training workshop, Eating Disorders Boot Camp, which she took around the country with Molly Kellogg, RD, LCSW, a psychotherapist, nutrition therapist, and writer, and now offers once each year in Texas.

And finally, branch five comprises Setnick's role as an author of the *ADA Pocket Guide to Eating Disorders*, *Eating Disorders Boot Camp*, *Advanced Eating Disorders Boot Camp Home-Study Courses*, and *Eating Disorders Book of Hope and Healing*.

"All of these roles require me to stay up-to-date on the latest advances in the field, including the politics, which led me to start the International Federation of Eating Disorder Dietitians with April Winslow, MS, RD, earlier this year," Setnick says. "This organization helps dietitians who work in the field and helps their patients get better access to care. We began the Dietitians Change Lives campaign and are starting to do outcomes research. Research and educating and mentoring students are two other roles that I take on as a way of strengthening the profession for the future." The purpose of the Dietitians Change Lives program is to gather first-person testimonials from individuals who've benefited from meeting with a dietitian to convey to the public and insurance providers how important it is that people have access to the services of dietitians.



Jessica Setnick

When Setnick first realized she wanted to explore the world of dietetics, her goal was to get her master's degree in sports nutrition and work for the Dallas Cowboys. "Then I took a class on eating disorders, and I realized that many of my classmates didn't understand eating disorders. And yet it made perfect sense to me," Setnick says. "It was like someone was finally speaking my language. I realized I could help people translate what they were doing with their food and understand it in a way that could allow them to just see food as fuel and stop using it or avoiding it. That's what I hope I provide to this day—a shame-free way of understanding eating disorders and hopefully dismantling them."

Setnick is also drawn to eating disorders treatment because it's the area that most allows her to delve into the psychology of eating. "It's also uncharted territory, where no one has all the answers and the dietitian has as much or more influence on a person's potential for recovery as any other treatment team member," Setnick says. "I also love teaching and helping other RDs use their natural talents to help their patients."

Patricia Pamela Smith, PhD, RD, LD
Program Chair of Dietetics and Nutrition, Herzing University

Patricia Pamela Smith has had a strong desire to help others through sharing and teaching her deep love for the field of food and nutrition. Her passion for the dietetics field has earned her accolades aplenty and led her to be a driving force at Herzing University, headquartered in Milwaukee, where she developed the new bachelor of science degree program for the Coordinated Program in Dietetics and Nutrition (CPD).



Patricia Pamela Smith

In addition to revising course catalogs and objectives, preparing the student handbook, researching and selecting equipment for the new food lab, meeting with prospective preceptors, and locating clinical sites for the supervised practice of the school's CPD, she also serves on various committees, such as Community Involvement, Student Retention, and Employee Recognition. She's also teaching courses and mentoring students while awaiting accreditation for the CPD from the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics/Accreditation Council for Education in Nutrition and Dietetics.

"One of the most rewarding areas of my career is to hear the success stories of my clients," Smith says. "These are clients who've benefited from my help by losing weight, lowering their high blood pressure by adopting a healthier lifestyle, and choosing to breast-feed their babies because of their newly gained knowledge about breast-feeding. I find most rewarding the fact that I'm able to help others to improve their health and lifestyle."

Smith works hard to reach those most in need of nutrition counseling and educate people about the role proper nutrition plays in their well-being. "I strive to reduce the disparities and lack of access to reliable food and nutrition information. I also strive to disseminate nutrition information so everyone has equal access to a healthful food supply," Smith says. She also aims to make a positive impact at the grassroots and local community levels by sharing nutrition messages and volunteering her time and resources.

"I hope to provide life-changing, life-improving information for my clients," Smith says. "Healthful living advice and activities will contribute to improved health, wellness, and an overall healthier lifestyle. I hope to provide a ray of hope to those who feel hopeless when it comes to their nutrition and health."

Tina Cloney, PhD, MSPH, RD, CSSD, LDN, CDE
Assistant Professor, Millikin University

Tina Cloney's love of the dietetics field has led to a distinguished career in which she's provided nutrition education in the inpatient and outpatient settings and in lipid, prenatal, and gastrointestinal clinics and has led various community seminars.

"My love of teaching in the field inspired me to pursue a master's degree and subsequently a doctorate degree," Cloney says. "My master's and doctorate degrees are in public health, health education, and health promotion."

Cloney's interest in communicating the role of nutrition in disease management and prevention still continues, as her doctorate allows her to teach future health professionals the importance of nutrition and physical activity in promoting health and preventing disease.

As a health and nutrition professor at Millikin University in Decatur, Illinois, Cloney's field experience and certifications have helped her design and teach courses in general nutrition, community nutrition, and sports nutrition and lead several practicums supervising students in the application of fitness and nutrition concepts. She helps people access resources in the community related to healthful living and teaches athletes how to use nutrition to protect themselves from injury and improve athletic performance.

Cloney was inspired by a nutrition professor to enter the field of dietetics, and she's been told that she's inspired many. "I wasn't familiar with the field or opportunities in the field before taking a nutrition course in college. I'd like to see more young people become aware of the opportunities and the field of dietetics as a whole," Cloney says. "I'd like to see more undergraduate opportunities and internships for students. I would hate to see these young people denied of their passion and their potential contributions to the field. There are so many different diseases caused or worsened by lifestyle. We need more people in the field to make an even greater difference in our communities and in [reducing] the leading causes of death in the United States."

She hopes to inspire a passion for acquiring nutrition knowledge and an appreciation of the integrative role between nutrition and exercise in preventing disease and promoting health. "I want to inspire my students and the community to be more proactive in their health; to want to learn as much as possible about nutrition, fitness, and wellness; to help my students help their future clients achieve their personal health and fitness goals," Cloney says. "As future dietitians, personal trainers, coaches, and teachers, I want to inspire a greater appreciation of the role of nutrition in overall health, promoting academic and athletic performance, and reducing risk of injury in athletic performance."



Tina Cloney

— Maura Keller is a Minneapolis-based writer and editor.