



October 9, 2007

Dear Iowa Department of Elder Affairs Alzheimer's Task Force:

On behalf of the Iowa Consultant Dietitians in Health Care Facilities (ICD-HCF) dietetics practice group, I would like to thank you for the opportunity to share some comments about the importance of nutritional care for the persons and families impacted by Alzheimer's disease. ICD-HCF is a strong organization of nutrition professionals who provide nutrition consultation to acute and long-term-care facilities, home care companies, healthcare agencies and foodservice industry

The provision and consumption of nutritional meals is often a challenge for individuals with Alzheimer's disease; poor food intake is common in older people with dementia. Poor nutritional intake is a contributing cause to rapid decline in health. Routine nutritional screening and intervention is important in the prevention of nutrition related complications including weight loss, pressure sores, hip fractures, infection, poor wound healing and choking or aspiration pneumonia related to chewing and swallowing problems. Malnutrition can lead to frequent or lengthy hospitalizations and earlier nursing home placement thus nutritional preventative measures impact quality of life for individuals with Alzheimer's disease and their families and reduce health care costs.

A registered dietitian can prioritize the individual's treatment through verification, evaluation and interpretation of physical, chemical and behavioral information. A registered dietitian can educate the caregiver on how to assist with dining to improve health outcomes given the individuals preferences and life circumstances. A dietitian can teach caregivers how to select and prepare foods of appropriate food consistency, use creative feeding techniques, minimize choking/aspiration risk and maximize food intake for their loved one. Dietitians can help prepare families for making end of life decisions regarding alternate feeding routes (oral feeding verses tube feeding). Ongoing monitoring of the individual's nutritional status is necessary as the disease progresses.

ICD-HCF strongly encourages the Alzheimer's task force to ensure that nutrition services are readily available for individuals with Alzheimer's and other dementia-related diseases. These individuals and their families need to have access to the services of a registered dietitian. Caregivers need to have nutrition interventions included in their formal training. Nutrition screening and intervention are important for cost containment and quality of life for both the individual with dementia as well as their caregivers.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads 'Andrea Maher RD, LD'.

Andrea Maher, RD, LD

Board Member, Iowa Consultant Dietitians in Health Care Facilities