UPEI Integrated Dietetic Internship Program

Preceptor Guide

Adapted from: A Preceptor’s guide For Teaching Dietetic Interns
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Section I
INTRODUCTION

You have graciously agreed to participate in the training of a dietetic intern enrolled in the University of Prince Edward Island Integrated Dietetic Internship program. In this important role you will introduce the student to the exciting world of dietetics and guide her/him in acquiring the knowledge, skill and competence required to practice as an entry level dietitian. The role of a preceptor can be both a challenging and rewarding experience. This guide has been developed to assist you in this role by providing some basic program information and a few tips. The guide outlines the general responsibilities of the student and the preceptor, planning of learning activities, development of a learning contract, and a review of the evaluation process. However, not every matter can be address in a guide so preceptors are encouraged to contact the internship coordinator directly should questions arise.

Program Overview

The UPEI dietetic Internship Program is a comprehensive integrated program consisting of three practicumuns (Levels) offered after third and fourth year of the degree program in Foods and Nutrition. The total length of the program ranges from 39-42 weeks depending on the individual student’s learning needs. The program offers a diversity of experiences in both traditional and non-traditional settings. The program is designed to not only prepare interns to work in currently existing positions but to also equipped them to enter emerging areas of dietetic practice.

The internship program is divide into three levels of varying duration. Students accepted into the internship program complete Level I and II of the program following the third year of studies. Between third and fourth year the intern completes level I which consists of one week of orientation and four weeks of basic food service. This is followed by level II which includes a four week placement in each of the following areas clinical, community and research for a total of twelve weeks. Upon completion of Level I and Level II the student returns to the academic program to complete their fourth year of the degree program. Following graduation from the degree program the intern completes the remainder of the dietetic internship, 22 to 24 weeks. The final level, Level III, is intended to offer more advanced training in the areas of food service, clinical nutrition and community nutrition. Two weeks of the final placement are allocated to supervised staff relief.

Learning guides have been developed for each program level. Each guide lists the performance objectives, competencies and sample enabling activities for each area of dietetic practice.
Preceptors who accept a student from the UPEI program will be provided with a package of information which includes a list of the performance objectives and suggested enabling activities which the student may undertake during the placement. The intern has a personal copy of the learning guide for their reference.

Section II
Responsibilities of Dietetic Interns and Preceptors

Preceptors are responsible to:

• provide an orientation to the work setting
• assist the intern to adapt to the new role
• advise the intern regarding policies, procedures and problem-solving approaches
• collaborate with the intern to identify learning activities which are beneficial to the organization and will support the established program learning objectives.
• provide help and supervision as needed
• provide guidance in complex, delicate and politically sensitive situations
• monitor the intern’s progress, provide timely feedback to the intern
• complete an objective, evaluation of the intern’s performance

Interns are responsible to:

• take responsibility for their own learning
• clearly communicate any limitations/challenges they may have in the area
• collaborate with the preceptor to identify learning activities which will support achievement of the identified performance objectives
• review the learning contract with the preceptor
• keep the preceptor informed about progress on assigned projects/activities
• inform the preceptor about what help or guidance is needed
• seek feedback from the preceptor on a regular basis, as well as, arranging periodic discussions of progress and learning needs
• arrange with the preceptor a time to complete the final evaluation
Section III
Off to a Good Start

Beginnings are apt to be shadowy ~ Rachel Carson

At the beginning of a rotation an intern may often feel uncertain and anxious. Taking time during the first day to share important information can save considerable time later. Below is a list of topics to consider discussing with the intern on the first day. Clearly laid out expectations often eliminates the potential for confusion and misunderstandings to arise.

1. **Provide orientation to:**
   - Physical space-tour of institution, location of washroom, parking, use of phone, workspace for intern, computer access etc.
   - Other staff
   - Dietitian’s’s role (job description)
   - Resources- teaching materials, AV equipment, diet manual
   - Policies and procedures- mission of the organization, description of programs, dress code, protocols, confidentiality, emergency procedures
   - Baseline knowledge and tools needed e.g. formulae, calculator, background readings etc.

2. **Provide scheduling details for:**
   - Hours of work
   - Daily routine
   - Lunch and coffee breaks
   - Rounds
   - Meetings
   - Availability of dietitian
   - Personal and written evaluations

3. **Determine where the intern is “at” academically, professionally and personally. Suggested questions for discussion.**
   - What style of learning best suits the learner?
   - What experience does the intern have thus far?
   - What courses does the intern feel have prepared them for this placement?
   - What skills will be useful in this placement?

4. **Clarify goals and objectives of the placement by reviewing the learning materials provided. In addition, discuss the following topics:**
• What does the intern personally hope to accomplish during this placement?
• How will this be achieved?
• Are there specific skills the student needs/wants to develop/practice?
• Discuss the tasks and projects to be completed. Clarify expectations.

5. **Discuss feedback and evaluation process.**
   • Role of the dietitian in the learning experience
   • Discuss when evaluation will occur
   • Set up appointments times for formal evaluation.

## Section IV

**Performance Objectives and Enabling Activities**

Performance objectives have been established for each level of the program. The objectives are categorized into the four broad areas of dietetic practice, research, food service, clinical and community. The preceptor will be provided with the performance objectives for the placement they will be supervising (i.e., Level III, clinical objectives). Following each performance objective is a list of enabling activities. The activities presented are *not required* activities but rather examples of the types of activities/projects students might undertake during a placement to achieve the stated performance objective. There is great flexibility in the type of projects students might complete to achieve the stated objective. Preceptors and interns are strongly encouraged to select activities and projects that will be beneficial to the organization and support the student’s personal learning needs.

All performance objectives must be completed during the placement. In some cases, however, it may be necessary for the intern to complete the activities numerous times until competence is achieved. This is especially true if the intern completes rotations in various areas.

**Mentoring Behaviours Which Support and Challenge**

The goal of mentoring is to guide the professional development of others. There are three broad categories of mentoring behaviours: support, challenge, and vision. Finding the perfect balance between support and challenge is what promotes the ideal learning situation. In challenging our students, we are asking them to go beyond their personal safety zone and to venture out into unfamiliar territory. The word support on the other hand includes the idea of providing
“scaffolding” which is something temporary which can be gradually removed as the student becomes “stronger” and more competent in the area of practice. The following diagram demonstrates the effect of various amount of support and challenge with an indication of how the student will respond in each type of situation.

**SUPPORT**: The mentor affirms the validity of the mentee’s experience and lets the learner know that he/she is understood. This fosters trust and helps develop the courage to move ahead.

**Support, examples:**
- provide an outline
- goals and objectives
- active listening
- make time for intern to research-slower pace
- make yourself accessible
- be present during difficult situation-actually tell them you do support them
- ask for feedback on your practice
- ask interns opinions and feelings
- share experiences
- discuss strengths / weaknesses/goals
- remember positive feedback
- consider how feedback is given
- advocate for intern when things go wrong
- explore intern’s reasons for decisions-let intern be heard.
CHALLENGE: opening a gap between learner and environment, a gap that creates tension in the learner requiring learning/skill development. Evaluate skill set of learner beforehand in order to assign appropriate challenge. Avoid overwhelming the learner.

Examples
- new, different activity without supervision and then allow for feedback afterwards - discuss what happened
- give problem, which they need to clarify first
- allow taking risks
- challenge with questions on the spot
- quiz on previous information
- expect them to have questions
- be the devil’s advocate
- insist on high standards
- role-play other dimensions for a case

VISION: Offer a kind of light ahead and show the path of success, helping learners make a leap, form a dream and be self reflective.

Examples:
- guide them to self-reflect re: strengths, weaknesses, activities to overcome weaknesses, clarifying goal
- encourage keeping a journal
- offer our own personal experiences
- role-modelling- professionalism
  - enthusiasm
  - commitment
- appreciation after difficult part of evaluation, say “I appreciate...about you”
- contribute to profession-past/future pf profession
- positive conclusion to rotation
- highlighting transferable skills
- encourage identification of interest
Section V
The Learning Contract

At the beginning of each placement the intern is required to prepare a learning contract. In consultation with the preceptor activities and projects to be completed during the placement are to be identified. The activities and projects selected must support the achievement of the established performance objectives for the placement. The coordinator may be consulted in situations where alternate activities are identified to ensure they support achievement of the performance objective. A copy of the finalized contract is forwarded to the coordinator by the intern.

Steps:
1. The intern reviews the performance objectives and competencies to be completed during the placement
2. The intern then identifies possible enabling activities to be completed which will support the performance objectives and competencies
3. The intern discussed the purposed learning plan with the preceptor. The preceptor may suggest alternative learning activities.
4. The intern and preceptor agree on the activities and projects to be undertaken, as well as, established completion dates
5. The learning plan is approved by the preceptor
6. The Intern forwards a copy of the plan to the coordinator

Section VI
Providing Feedback and Student Evaluation

Timely feedback is an important component of the learning process. Dietetic interns are encouraged to request feedback from their preceptors throughout each placement. The purpose of the feedback is to help the intern recognize areas of strength in their performance and areas where change is required. They may need direction on how to modify their performance to achieve the desired outcome. Although valuable to the learning process, providing feedback that addresses issues or problems can be difficult. The following is a list of tips which may prove helpful when giving feedback to a student on their performance.
When to Evaluate:

**Ongoing feedback**
- Helps the intern define progress.
- Helps the intern integrate theory and practice.

**Mid-point evaluation (verbal)**
- Provides summary of progress.
- Conducted to indicate to the intern how well s/he is meeting the objectives and whether there is a need for improvement.
- Provides intern a opportunity to implement a plan to strengthen areas of weakness.

**Final evaluation**
- The intern’s stage of progress is evaluated at the end of the placement.
- This evaluation should reflect the intern’s performance near the end of the placement rather than the beginning.
- The student completes a self evaluation.
- The evaluation is to be discussed with the intern.
- *The results of the final evaluation should not come as a surprise.*

The Process of Giving Feedback On Specific Issues/Concerns

**Step 1: Prepare**
- have sufficient information about the issue
- have sufficient knowledge of the learner
- have an understanding of the problem

**Step 2: Involve the learner**
- provide a comfortable and relaxed atmosphere in a private setting
- remove distraction(forward phone, turn off pager, etc.)
- allow the learner to speak first. “How would you assess your performance?”

**Step 3: Describe the Issue**
- limit the discussion to one or two points/issues
- limit your discussion to observed behaviour
- separate the performance/issue from the person
Step 4: Ensure understanding
- be specific, unambiguous, concrete and objective when explaining expectations
- be supportive and encourage an exchange of ideas
- make practical recommendations
- identify resources and sources of reference materials
- confirm learning

Step 5: Review and agree
- review critical points to ensure common objectives
- discuss strategies and agree on the next step(s)
- avoid dictatorial words: “must”, “should”, “ought” Such words ad “recommend”, “you may wish to try/explore”

Evaluation General Guidelines

- Evaluation is based on the student’s ability to apply skills and knowledge in the completion of established enabling activities.

- An evaluation form is provided for each placement and is to be completed by the preceptor by the end of the placement.

- In situations where a student has spent time with more than one preceptor it is recommended that each preceptor complete a separate evaluation.

- A midway evaluation is recommended for placements which are greater than two weeks in length. Activities completed can be signed off and progress on other activities reviewed.

- The student’s performance will be rated using the scale of Novice to Expert. (Rating scale attached)

- An overall rating can be given for each performance objective. If specific activities under that objective are rated differently. The alternate rating can be recorded beside the activity.

- To successfully complete the program interns must achieve a rating of competent for all competencies.
Competent performance is a complex set of behaviours built on the components of knowledge, skills and attitudes.

**Competent** means...
An intern working at this level of skill can carry out the problem solving process (assessment, planning, implementation, evaluation, communication), and does so independently the majority of the time when encountering familiar situations. However, the student recognizes her/his limitations and seeks advice from others in unfamiliar or more complex situations.

**References**


