You may not have thought about it, but you should know how your association works. NJDA has a governing body, its Board of Directors. Within it, there are 14 Officers who are charged with running different aspects of the organization. They also review, deliberate, and approve the actions we take as an organization, especially the money we spend making things happen for our members.

Beyond that, every year there are between 30 and 50 committee positions that do specific jobs. On some committees, like the awards committee, members are only busy for a short period in the spring. On others, like the legislation committee and the social media group, members work part-time year round as needed, and as time permits. Most committee’s activities fall somewhere in between; the members get active when there is something that needs to be done, and otherwise just think and plan for future activities.

Every one of these positions is held by a volunteer! Most of us have jobs, family obligations, and more, just like you. But we give a little bit of our time to make NJDA an association that supports and enhances us and our professional colleagues.

When I took office last summer, I had a difficult time finding people who were willing to accept some of the committee assignments that needed to be filled. Now, having worked towards this year’s annual election for officers, I saw how difficult it was to get members to run for these positions. It is very disheartening. I am so enthusiastic about making this association a great asset for its members. I wish it were not so hard to find others who feel the same way, and are willing to give even a small bit of their time.

I know you’re busy – so are all of us who volunteer our time for NJDA. But if you’ve participated in things that were useful to you, think about helping make those things available to others. Or if you have ever found yourself saying “I wish we had xyz in New Jersey”, think about helping your association to make it happen.

Every member is welcome at NJDA Board meetings. Come see how we work. And think about how you could help!

Respectfully yours,
Audrey Adler President
Public Policy Workshop 2013: Policy from the Ground Up!

VITA TAM BONE, MONTCLAIR STATE DIETETIC INTERN AND ERIN GAGER, UMDNJ DIETETIC INTERN

Registered dietitians (RDs) and nutrition advocates gathered in Washington, DC once again, for the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics (AND) 2013 Public Policy Workshop (PPW). The three days were filled with insightful information and tips leading up to visits on Capitol Hill in order to put the information in action and advocate for dietetic professionals. PPW began with an introduction by AND President, Dr. Ethan Bergman. He introduced this year’s theme, “If dietetics is your profession, then policy should be your passion.” Our keynote speaker, Kiki McLean, pointed out six key components to developing an influential message, which included the concepts of relevancy, targeted audiences, definition, authenticity, timeliness, and specificity. She identified the importance of “inoculating a problem”, or eradicating an issue before it even becomes one. Discussions and presentations were held on the Academy’s position and role in advocating for issues such as sequestration, the Older Americans Act, the Farm Bill, the Diabetes Prevention in Medicare Act as well as briefly reviewing the Ryan White HIV/AIDS Program Reauthorization. Farm Bill updates influencing the Academy included discussing the impact that the 28% cut to SNAP-Ed had on our dietetic professionals and our nation. It was also introduced that a proposed budgetary cut would eliminate SNAP-Ed entirely. As Tracy Fox, RD said, “SNAP-Ed makes SNAP work” which is one of the many reasons why RDs need to fight to retain funding for nutrition education programs. Attendees were given options on what afternoon workshop to attend. In Workshop A, “Be the Leader! Expanding Coverage Through Advocacy,” six great speakers shared their own successes in getting greater insurance coverage for RDs, and reminded the audience that it is up to them to make changes and improve upon the recognition and reimbursement for the profession. Workshop B, “Consumer Protection and Licensure: Making Sense of our Mission,” gave a brief history of licensure in the United States and conducted brainstorming sessions on how to sustain licensure in some states and obtain it in others. The final option, titled “How Technology Can Move You from Smart to Genius in Nutrition,” focused on the benefits and potential in using electronic health records, and other forms of technology, to continually improve the quality of healthcare. Generous PPW sponsors, Coca-Cola, The National Dairy Council, and SoyJoy, spoke about how their companies are working to put into practice the ideals of good nutrition, sustainability, working in conjunction with the Academy’s message and goals. The first night of PPW concluded with a film festival featuring “Apple Pushers,” hosted by the Hunger and Environmental Nutrition (HEN) Fund. With almost 60 attendees, the film featured the struggle and success of immigrants in NYC who tried the green cart program to provide fresh produce to low-income neighborhoods and food deserts throughout the city.

Beginning bright and early the next day, the Academy acknowledged “Meatless Mondays,” providing a vegetarian breakfast spread. Past Academy President Sylvia Escott-Stump grasped the stage as well as several other leaders in the dietetics field. A well-balanced debate on the issues of GMO usage and labeling was presented to attendees, leaving ample information for members to develop an educated opinion on this controversial topic. Following the GMO debate was another breakout session separated by novice public policy attendees and the advanced members. The novice session, “Communicating Effectively and Confidently” encouraged new PPW members to network with elected officials and stand behind candidates who support their profession. Some of the suggestions include following your representative on social media such as Facebook and Twitter to learn about their scheduled public appearances and to develop a relationship in those areas as well as to “get on their rolodex.” Attendees were given options on what afternoon workshop to attend. In Workshop A, “Be the Leader! Expanding Coverage Through Advocacy,” six great speakers shared their own successes in getting greater insurance coverage for RDs, and reminded the audience that it is up to them to make changes and improve upon the recognition and reimbursement for the profession. Workshop B, “Consumer Protection and Licensure: Making Sense of our Mission,” gave a brief history of licensure in the United States and conducted brainstorming sessions on how to sustain licensure in some states and obtain it in others. The final option, titled “How Technology Can Move You from Smart to Genius in Nutrition,” focused on the benefits and potential in using electronic health records, and other forms of technology, to continually improve the quality of healthcare. Generous PPW sponsors, Coca-Cola, The National Dairy Council, and SoyJoy, spoke about how their companies are working to put into practice the ideals of good nutrition, sustainability, working in conjunction with the Academy’s message and goals. The first night of PPW concluded with a film festival featuring “Apple Pushers,” hosted by the Hunger and Environmental Nutrition (HEN) Fund. With almost 60 attendees, the film featured the struggle and success of immigrants in NYC who tried the green cart program to provide fresh produce to low-income neighborhoods and food deserts throughout the city.

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In addition to networking, the importance of dietitians performing research was also emphasized by Allison Steiber PhD, RD. A meatless lunch of lentils, basmati rice and spinach was served in the spirit of “Meatless Monday.” The afternoon continued with a discussion on sustainability and building a local food system. Attendees were then briefed on regulation updates, including issues of menu labeling nutrition information, the Access to Frontline Healthcare Act which would allow tuition reimbursement for dietitians, and other health professionals, working in underserved areas. Regulations are currently proposed to increase the nutritional standards of competitive school foods. PPW was honored to have Heidi Heitkamp, Senator from North Dakota, speak about her support of dietitians, their message and the importance of nutrition programs for communities. The evening concluded with an ANDPAC event and fundraiser for ANDPAC supporters who donated at least $125.

By Tuesday morning, attendees were ready to descend onto Capitol Hill. The morning was brought in by an address from the Academy President Elect, Glennia McCollum. Then White House Assistant Chef and Senior Policy Advisor for Healthy Food Initiatives, Sam Kass discussed the Let’s Move Campaign and reinforced the support that the first lady has for dietitians. Immediately leading up to the hill visit, Representative Jim McGovern and Representative Bruce Braley delivered insightful and inspiring speeches. Congressman McGovern stated, “If you ask American’s what’s our plan to end hunger, they’ll say we don’t have one. They say it takes a village, I say it takes a plan.” With that, Academy members divided by state to devise their own plan, a plan to advocate for the Academy, for the dietetics profession, and most importantly for the public.

PPW ignited a flame in many Academy members, a flame that is hoped to spread like wildfire throughout our community so that our voices are heard louder and stronger. We are responsible for the outcomes of our profession. Let’s fight for it.