



Sam's Story

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It is rather surreal to look back and recall the journey that has formed the nutrition professional I am today. My interest in becoming a registered dietitian (RD) was sparked by my mother, Frances, when I was a junior in high school. I was playing ice hockey, tennis, and running track and field simultaneously. My mom pointed out that I seemed to be getting more and more fatigued and that my performance was starting to suffer. One day while working on biology homework, she came into my room with a book titled, "Nutrition for Life," written by two RD's. Expressing her concern, she thought I might find it useful. I started flipping through the pages, reading about the different macronutrients, calculating estimated needs, balancing diet and the biological functions of many nutrients in our bodies. After a few hours I realized I had finished the book, and I began to explore the possibility of becoming a registered dietitian.

My exploration of dietetic careers stretched from sports dietetics, to community, clinical, and everything in-between. It was only when I began filling in for a coworker on maternity leave that I came across the audience of our hospital's oncology patients. I realized that we had a very underserved and tragically misled group of critically ill patients who were clinging onto all the wrong nutrition recommendations. Seeing how tragic the diagnosis of cancer, at any stage, can be and how desperate some find themselves searching for any recommendations to help them simply live, I found myself drawn to becoming a credible and trustworthy source of nutrition information for this vulnerable audience.

In the world of cancer, there are many myths and conspiracies about nutrition. Many are presented by integrative/holistic minded individuals who may not be a credible source of nutrition information for patients. I love to teach others about how nutrition is just as important as their cancer-fighting therapies, while debunking the myths, to ultimately help them have some peace-of-mind, feel their best, and beat their cancer.

My favorite approach to communicate with our cancer patients is one-on-one nutrition counseling. Here I am able to not only educate the patient, but also provide the support and individualized attention each of them so desperately needs during treatment. It is important to me that I am treating the patient, and not just their diagnosis. Additionally, when larger groups are in need of nutrition education, I feel confident providing presentations or cooking demonstrations in a variety of settings. So far this has ranged from men's health programs, support groups, and even grocery store and Facebook Live cooking demonstrations.

While already aware of the importance of audience-centered, evidence-based, and clear nutrition communication from collegiate courses and a dietetic internship, I truly saw its effects when working in the hospital intensive care unit. Talking with doctors and family members to advocate for and explain appropriate nutrition therapy. This carried over into the Cancer Institute I work in now. There my goal continues to be a credible and effective nutrition communicator not only for our patients, but also for our coworkers, and the general public. I hope to continue learning about the use of nutrition in oncology and to always grow in my ability to effectively tailor this knowledge to each patient's unique needs.

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