

Senator Maria Cantwell
511 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

January 20, 2009

Dear Senator Cantwell,

Medical Nutrition Therapy (MNT) is a fundamental component of the Ryan White CARE Act providing comprehensive care and improving quality of life for people living with HIV and AIDS. Medical Nutrition Therapy is a comprehensive nutrition assessment that is conducted by Registered Dietitian's to determine the level of risk a patient has for developing further nutrition complications, deficiencies, illnesses, and opportunistic infections. Clinical and dietary components are assessed and then based on the individual needs of the patient, a therapeutic nutrition intervention is put into place. No other health care professional has the tools and training to assess the needs of the client as does a Registered Dietitian.

It is estimated by the Center for Disease Control, that approximately 1.1 million people are living with HIV in the United States. Because of Antiretroviral treatment, persons living with HIV are living longer, optimal lives. Patients living with HIV/AIDS do not only endure symptoms and side effects from this disease, but also other co-morbidities and opportunistic infections that are likely to develop due to compromised immune systems and an aging population of those infected. Medical Nutrition Therapy not only assists with managing HIV/AIDS, but can also help with managing other conditions such as hypertension, diabetes, hepatitis, cardiovascular disease, high cholesterol, and high triglyceride levels, among others.

Adequate nutrition is one component of eradicating symptoms, preserving lean body mass and weight, preventing the development of nutrient deficiencies, reducing the risk of co-morbidities, and maximizing the effectiveness of medical and pharmacological treatments. Medications can interact with food modifying the gastrointestinal tract creating side effects such as nausea, diarrhea, and fatigue. Registered Dietitians counsel clients through these concerns helping them adhere to medications by managing the side effects and changes in appetite.

Frequently, patients suffer from poor absorption of nutrients and altered metabolism of nutrients due to gastrointestinal infections. Once an AIDS patient experiences a significant amount of involuntary weight loss, this increases the likelihood of opportunistic infections to develop. All of these can be prevented, slowed, or treated with the help of a Registered Dietitian, the nutrition expert, through Medical Nutrition Therapy.

According to the American Dietetic Association, many participants of the Ryan White CARE Act are low-income and do not have the availability of credible nutrition information or nutritious foods. For these participants it is even more crucial for them to have a comprehensive nutrition assessment to help combat the effects of this disease and to preserve lean body mass. I urge you to ensure the inclusion of Registered Dietitian services in the new Ryan White Care Act legislation. Medical Nutrition Therapy can have a vital impact on survival and quality of life for persons living with HIV/AIDS.

Thank you for your commitment to health and nutrition programs. Should you need any additional information regarding these concerns please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

Ms. Megan Stout
Dietetic Intern, WSU Coordinated Program