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Salary Negotiation among Dietetics Professionals: Lived Experiences and a Three-Pronged Approach to Advancing Negotiation Skills and Confidence

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Cover Page Footnote

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ABSTRACT

There is a lack of tools and training to assist in salary and benefit (S&B) negotiations within the nutrition profession. This study is the first to analyze thoughts, feelings, and experiences with S&B negotiations among nutrition and dietetics professionals. The 32-item, web-based, cross-sectional survey study was completed by English-speaking individuals of any gender who identified as a “nutrition and dietetics professional,” were 18 years of age or older in the United States or US Territory. Participant demographics, experience, confidence, and success with negotiation of S&B, value of negotiation, and interest in learning more were the primary outcome measures determined before data collection. Means, standard deviations, and ranges were calculated for ordinal data with frequencies on nominal data. ANOVAs were conducted to evaluate relationships between demographics and negotiation. Participants (N = 1239) were mostly white (90.2%), female (94.5%), registered dietitian (RD) (96.8%) members of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics (96.1%). Clinical practitioners accounted for the largest practice area (38.5%). Non-RD professionals had a significantly higher mean for experience with negotiation than RD’s, DTR’s and participants eligible for the RD exam ($P = 0.008$) and had higher confidence ($P = 0.001$). Clinical dietitians had significantly lower satisfaction with current salary ($P < 0.001$) and experience ($P < 0.001$), confidence ($P < 0.001$), and success ($P < 0.001$) with negotiation but had significantly higher interest in advancing negotiation skills ($P = 0.017$) than all other practice areas. Early education, exposure, and empowerment are key factors in improving the negotiation experience that begins in the undergraduate experience and continues well into professional practice.

Keywords: Negotiation, salary and benefits, dietetics, nutrition and dietetics professionals, registered dietitians

INTRODUCTION

The aspect of negotiation in the training of healthcare professionals has historically centered on negotiation skills related to patient interaction and difficult care decisions.¹

Negotiation of salaries and benefits (S&B) to further one's career and improve job satisfaction, a crucial skill set, is missing in most training sessions. Many high-salary professions (medical and other) have professional journals that publish articles covering both why and how to negotiate S&B.^{2,3} Unfortunately, there are no such articles for nutrition and dietetics, which are a critical part of the medical and healthcare communities in the United States.

Notably, the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics publishes an annual compensation and benefits survey of the dietetics profession, which is often cited as a negotiation tool.^{4,5} However, this survey is better suited as a report providing salary averages than as a tool to help increase salary. The survey is limited by bi-yearly releases with clear indications that higher-salaried registered dietitians (RDs) with decades of service to the profession skew the mean towards increased annual wage figures presented in the report. The median annual wage figure presented may not reflect the realistic median incomes of RDs across all states, because it does not consider the vast differences in the cost of living across the country. Additionally, recent survey results only include data from a sample of 6313 RDs, which is 19.5% of the total current profession.⁵ Many professionals have found the tool to be inaccurate, limiting its helpfulness in S&B negotiation.

Currently, there is a lack of accessible tools, training, or published research articles specifically aimed at nutrition and dietetics professionals to promote negotiation and improvement of salaries across all areas of practice. A search for “dietitian negotiation resources” in PubMed and Google Scholar returns results mostly related to negotiation of patient goals, rather than salary.⁶⁻⁸ Further, a

Google search of “dietitian negotiation resources” returns resources from various RD-focused companies and organizations in the form of quick advice columns podcasts and online videos.⁹⁻¹³ The brief tips provided in these resources focus on aspects such as showing RD value to employers, researching comparable salaries, and being prepared to make a counteroffer. Notably, the Nutrition and Dietetics Educators and Preceptors group of The Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics provides a *Salary Negotiation Toolkit* for students, interns, and educators to aid in education of negotiation principles and provide resources.¹⁴

This study aimed to assess confidence in, individual experiences of, and opinions about the negotiation of S&B among nutrition and dietetics professionals in the United States (US) to provide information to professional nutrition organizations to improve information and member benefits related to the negotiation of S&B.

METHODS

A 32-item web-based cross-sectional survey was administered to a convenience sample of nutrition and dietetics professionals in the US. Participants who identified as a “nutrition and dietetics professional,” were either an RD, Dietetic Technician Registered (DTR), or individual who recently completed an ACEND, Accreditation Council for Education in Nutrition and Dietetics, accredited Dietetic Internship, but has yet to sit for the RD-Exam. Those who identified as a “non-RD nutrition professional,” were any individual who works in nutrition or dietetics as a career but does not hold a RD or DTR credential. Participants were recruited using multiple web-based outlets including two emails sent out by the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics to those actively registered with CDR, the Commission on Dietetic Registration, who opted in to receiving email correspondence. Members of the research team actively posted study information on Academy Dietetic Practice

Group member message boards and on social media pages for state affiliates including Louisiana, Minnesota, Illinois, Texas, and New Jersey. Study information was shared on the message board for the Food and Nutrition Section of the American Public Health Association to reach nutrition and dietetics professionals who may not be Academy members or identify as an RD or DTR. Participants had to be at least 18 years of age and located in the US to participate. No other inclusion or exclusion criteria were used in the study. The Institutional Review Board (IRB) of the Louisiana State University (LSU) Agricultural Center (AgCenter) approved this study prior to survey administration.

Measurements

Items to assess experience with negotiation of S&B related to experience, confidence, value of and interest in learning more, value of negotiation, and success are shown in Table 1. Answers to these items were either provided on a 5-point Likert scale or “check all that apply” option list. Additional questions

assessed current salary satisfaction, other factors (besides S&B) that are important when negotiating, ways in which participants would like to learn about negotiation of S&B, factors that may keep participants from obtaining the salary they desire, comfort with talking about money in a general sense, and where participants may have obtained training and information on negotiation in the past. Furthermore, *“If you were negotiating with someone for your salary and/or benefits, what top question(s) would you ask?”* and *“If you had known more about negotiation strategies, would your last professional negotiation conversation have been more successful? Please describe it in as much or as little detail as you want to share.”* were open-ended. The demographic items included current nutritional credentials, current yearly salary ranges, current employment sectors, current practice areas, years of professional experience, focus area of the current job position, and the work/practice area of the current job position. Additional questions included gender identification, highest degree obtained, state(s) of current practice licensure, age, race, and ethnicity.

Table 1. Survey items to assess personal experience with negotiation of salary and benefits

| Survey Question Order and Prompt | Survey Answer Options | | | | |
|--|---|--------------------------------|---|------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 1. How satisfied are you with your current salary? | 1 Extremely unsatisfied | 2 Somewhat unsatisfied | 3 Neither satisfied nor unsatisfied | 4 Somewhat satisfied | 5 Extremely satisfied |
| 2. Apart from salary, what other factors are important for you when negotiating? (Check all that apply) | a. Additional job training b. Benefits (i.e., insurance/retirement/etc.) c. Child Care d. Continuing Education (CPEU) assistance/reimbursement e. Job start date f. Travel reimbursement, g. Tuition assistance/reimbursement h. Paid Time Off (PTO), i. Work-life balance j. Work environment (i.e., equipment) k. Working from home l. Other (Specify) m. I've never considered negotiating past my salary | | | | |
| 3. What is your experience with negotiating your salary and/or benefits? ⁱ | 1 Extremely inexperienced | 2 Somewhat inexperienced | 3 Neither experienced nor inexperienced | 4 Somewhat experienced | 5 Extremely experienced |
| 4. How confident do you feel negotiating your salary and/or benefits? ⁱⁱ | 1 Extremely unconfident | 2 Somewhat unconfident | 3 Neither confident nor unconfident | 4 Somewhat confident | 5 Extremely confident |
| 5. How interested are you in learning more about salary/benefits negotiation skills? ⁱⁱⁱ | 1 Extremely uninterested | 2 Somewhat uninterested | 3 Neither interested nor uninterested | 4 Somewhat interested | 5 Extremely interested |
| 6. If you were interested in learning to negotiate your salary and/or benefits how would you like to learn? (Check all that apply) | a. Dedicated web content on eairightPRO b. Experiential learning opportunities c. FNCE booth with experts d. FNCE posters e. FNCE session f. Interactive online group g. In-person class h. Integrate into internship/supervised Practice i. JAND/journal articles j. List of relevant blogs, websites, and social media sites k. Online continuing education l. Online Certificate of Training program m. Training from Professionals outside of The Academy n. Webinar or Series o. Working with a mentor p. Other (Specify) | | | | |
| 7. How much is learning to be a better negotiator worth to you? ^{iv} | 1 Extremely invaluable | 2 Somewhat invaluable | 3 Neither valuable nor invaluable | 4 Somewhat valuable | 5 Extremely valuable |

| 8. How valuable do you feel negotiation skills are to your area of practice / expertise? ^v | 1 Extremely invaluable | 2 Somewhat invaluable | 3 Neither valuable nor invaluable | 4 Somewhat valuable | 5 Extremely valuable |
|---|---|--------------------------------|---|------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 9. What may keep you from not obtaining the salary you want with your current or future employer(s)? (Check all that apply) | a. Fear of upsetting management b. Fear of upsetting coworkers c. Fear of being told no d. Knowledge of current budget e. Have been told there will be no increases this year f. I assume I am being paid what they can afford g. Lack of salary information h. Lack of skills to follow through to the end i. Lack of knowledge of my coworker's salaries/wages j. Unsure how to ask/start conversation k. Other (Specify) | | | | |
| 10. How comfortable are you with talking about money (in general)? | 1 Extremely uncomfortable | 2 Somewhat uncomfortable | 3 Neither comfortable nor uncomfortable | 4 Somewhat comfortable | 5 Extremely comfortable |
| 11. How have you been successful in efforts to improve your negotiation skills? ^{vi} | 1 Extremely unsuccessful | 2 Somewhat unsuccessful | 3 Neither successful nor unsuccessful | 4 Somewhat successful | 5 Extremely successful |
| 12. In what areas have you been successful in negotiating in the past? (Check all that apply) | a. Additional job training b. Benefits (i.e., insurance/retirement/etc.) c. Child Care d. Continuing Education (CPEU) assistance/reimbursement e. Job start date f. Salary, g. Travel reimbursement, h. Tuition assistance/reimbursement i. Paid Time Off (PTO), j. Work-life balance k. Work environment (i.e., equipment) l. Working from home m. Other (Specify) n. None of the Above | | | | |

Survey items included items assessing overall general:

ⁱExperience with negotiation of salary and/or benefits measured with a 5-point Likert scale from extremely inexperienced to extremely experienced.

ⁱⁱConfidence with negotiation of salary and/or benefits measured with a 5-point Likert scale from extremely unconfident to extremely confident.

ⁱⁱⁱInterest in learning more about salary and benefits negotiation skills measured with a 5-point Likert scale from extremely uninterested to extremely interested

^{iv}Value the participants place on learning to become a better negotiator measured with a 5-point Likert scale from extremely invaluable to extremely valuable

^vValue the participants place on negotiation skills related to their current area of practice/expertise measured with a 5-point Likert scale from extremely invaluable to extremely valuable

^{vi}Past success with efforts to improve negotiation skills was measured with a 5-point Likert scale from extremely unsuccessful to extremely successful

Data Collection

The survey was conducted in mid-April 2021 and was available 24-hours a day on the Qualtrics survey system for a total of 4 weeks. Participants were informed that the survey would take 15 to 20 minutes and that they could begin the survey and return later to complete it if the survey were accessed again using the same device.

Data Analysis

Statistical analyses were conducted using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 25.¹⁵ Means, standard deviations, and ranges were calculated for all items utilizing a 5-point Likert scale. For items with “check all that apply” options, frequencies ranked responses from least popular to most popular. A series of analysis of variance (ANOVA) tests was conducted to evaluate the relationship between items related to the negotiation of S&B and various demographic items. Owing to a lack of literature on the topic of interest, a power analysis was not conducted. The alpha level was set at $P \leq 0.05$ for all analyses.

RESULTS

The 1,239 survey participants were mostly white (90.2%), females (94.5%), and had RD credentials ($n = 1,199$; 96.8%). A total of 18 participants identified as a DTR and 8 were recent graduates of dietetic internships who had not yet taken the RD exam, making the “nutrition professional” group a total of 1225 for statistical analysis. “Non-RD nutrition professionals” ($n = 14$) had significantly more negotiation experience than RD’s and participants eligible for the RD exam ($n = 8$; $P = 0.008$). Non-RD nutrition professionals also had significantly higher S&B negotiation confidence ($P = 0.001$) than the recent internship graduates.

All salary groups over \$21,000 per year had significantly more negotiation experience and significantly higher S&B negotiation confidence

than those with less than \$20,000 per year ($P < 0.001$). The group with \$100,000 or more per year had the most S&B negotiation experience, found the possession of negotiation skills to be the most valuable ($P = 0.049$), was significantly more comfortable talking about money ($P < 0.001$), and had significantly more S&B negotiation success ($P < 0.001$) than those with less than \$74,000 experience.

Clinical practitioners accounted for the largest proportion of nutrition practice areas (38.5%) among this sample. These practitioners reported significantly lower salary satisfaction ($P < 0.001$), experience ($P < 0.001$), confidence ($P < 0.001$), and success ($P < 0.001$) but had significantly higher interest in advancing negotiation skills ($P = .017$) than all other practice areas. The participants indicated a preference for live webinars ($n = 801$, 64.6%) and other web-based continuing education opportunities ($n = 799$, 64.5%) to learn how to negotiate. Participants obtained training or information about negotiations from friends ($n = 461$, 37.2%), family ($n = 452$, 36.5%), and other nutrition and dietetics professionals ($n = 315$, 25.4%). Descriptive statistics and relationships between select survey items and sample demographics can be viewed in Table 2.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics and Relationships between Survey Items related to Salary and Negotiation and Sample Demographics

| | n | Confidence Mean (SD) ^a | P-value | Experience Mean (SD) ^b | P-value | Success Mean (SD) ^c | P-value | Satisfaction Mean (SD) ^d | P-value |
|--------------------|------|-----------------------------------|---------|-----------------------------------|---------|--------------------------------|---------|-------------------------------------|---------|
| Practice Area | | | <.001* | | <.001* | | <.001* | | <.001* |
| Clinical | 477 | 2.53 (1.23) | | 2.61 (1.24) | | 2.99 (0.91) | | 2.96 (1.26) | |
| Public Health | 172 | 2.62 (1.18) | | 2.67 (1.27) | | 3.05 (0.91) | | 3.02 (1.29) | |
| Informatics | 119 | 3.31 (1.17) | | 3.26 (1.18) | | 3.42 (0.82) | | 3.62 (1.23) | |
| Education | 100 | 3.03 (1.18) | | 3.02 (1.20) | | 3.08 (0.94) | | 3.23 (1.27) | |
| Research | 95 | 2.92 (1.23) | | 3.11 (1.18) | | 3.18 (0.96) | | 3.19 (1.26) | |
| Credential Status | | | .001* | | .008* | | .007* | | .073 |
| RD | 1199 | 2.81 (1.24) | | 2.88 (1.26) | | 3.13 (0.93) | | 3.19 (1.28) | |
| RD-eligible | 8 | 1.38 (0.51) | | 1.38 (0.51) | | 2.13 (1.35) | | 2.13 (1.35) | |
| Non-RD | 14 | 3.50 (1.16) | | 3.07 (1.14) | | 3.00 (1.03) | | 2.93 (1.49) | |
| Academy Membership | | | .785 | | .656 | | .377 | | .075 |
| Member | 1191 | 2.80 (1.24) | | 2.87 (1.26) | | 3.12 (0.92) | | 3.19 (1.28) | |
| Non-member | 48 | 2.85 (1.30) | | 2.79 (1.27) | | 3.12 (1.03) | | 2.85 (1.42) | |
| Salary Range | | | <.001* | | <.001* | | <.001* | | <.001* |
| <20K | 28 | 2.57 (1.20) | | 2.50 (1.23) | | 2.68 (0.98) | | 2.61 (1.16) | |
| 21K - 49K | 218 | 2.28 (1.11) | | 2.20 (1.14) | | 2.74 (0.93) | | 2.58 (1.24) | |
| 50K - 99K | 744 | 2.79 (1.23) | | 2.90 (1.22) | | 3.14 (0.88) | | 3.26 (1.34) | |
| >100K | 159 | 3.52 (1.11) | | 3.59 (1.15) | | 3.56 (0.95) | | 3.87 (1.34) | |

*P ≤ 0.05

^a "How confident do you feel negotiating?"^b "What is your experience negotiating?"^c "How have you been successful in efforts to improve your negotiation skills?"^d "How satisfied are you with your current salary?"

All items had a possible range of 1 to 5.

Self-Reported Lived Experiences of Nutrition and Dietetics Professionals

When asked to share whether their last professional negotiation conversation would have been more successful if they knew more about negotiation strategies, participants shared their individual experiences. In general, the participants reported that they would have had more success, higher confidence, be braver in discussing money and would have felt valued by their employers if they had used negotiation strategies. Some reported that even if they were successful in negotiating their salary, they still felt underpaid and wished to ask for a higher salary to be paid what they were worth.

Many mirrored the sentiment that the profession is underpaid for the level of education, knowledge, and skills possessed, and practitioners who continue to accept low salaries perpetuate the ongoing low-average-salary employers use as benchmarks. A summary of the qualitative data featuring poignant opinions from the nutrition and dietetics professionals who participated in the survey was condensed into author-identified common themes (confidence, resources from The Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, lack of training, worth, gender gaps, and perceived value (or lack thereof) of dietitians) as reported in Table 3.

Table 3. Common themes and selected quotes among answers to survey question, “If you had known more about negotiation strategies, would your last professional negotiation conversation have been more successful? Please describe as much or as little detail as you want to share.”

| Quotes Demonstrating Common Themes |
|--|
| “What I saw to be most effective in the past was all the dietitians where I work coming together as a group, disclosing all our salaries to each other & advocating AS A GROUP for higher salaries ¹ . This got “their” attention” |
| “Yes, I would have felt more confident ¹ and less apologetic for asking for a higher salary.” |
| “I have been independently working on my salary and benefit negotiation for a few years. My most recent negotiation has been my most successful yet and it got me an extra \$10k/year. I do, however, think I could have leveraged more if I’d not been so green and scared of the process ¹ . I have been very disappointed with the Academy ² and my education ³ when it comes to knowing my worth ⁴ and how to price services and negotiate salary and benefits. This is SO needed, especially since our field is predominantly female ⁵ .” |
| “Yes, of course. I would have focused more on the budgetary and personnel responsibilities of my position compared to others with the same title but with 90% fewer workers and budget responsibilities. Also, I would have asked to be paid more than my MALE counterparts ⁵ .” |
| “This is my second career, my first career I worked mostly with men and saw how men ask for raises at any time ⁵ by showing their value and asking for more responsibility. This should be taught to all women in school before looking for their first jobs like fathers show their sons.” |
| “Insane that, I believe the current industry standard for dietitians is extremely low salary, therefore even if my negotiation strategies are excellent, there are many institutions that will not bend. Most dietitians do not negotiate their economic worth ⁴ , causing our collective salary standards to remain subpar, thereby affecting all of us in the field.” |
| “I am not sure if it would be more successful, but I would have felt more involved in knowing my worth .” ⁴ |
| “In our area, we are underpaid for our education and experience. It is appalling when I see how much education, money (internships), personal sacrifice (moving away from family to get internships) and training we now require and then after it is achieved, the job offers and salary that is available. It is hard to negotiate on the individual level, when as a whole our profession is not financially respected ^{vi} .” |

"Yes, I think it would provide a lot of clarity to my employer to have them **understand how valuable a dietitian is**⁶. I feel there is still the misconception that a "nutritionist" and dietitian do the same thing and MNT is not a known term or understood definition to employers or HR."

"Dietitians, in general, are **undervalued**⁶ since we cannot charge for services. The Academy was not proactive in working to monetarily **value our work**⁶. It is impossible to negotiate a salary in a healthcare setting which is due to our inability to charge for services. The Academy has failed us in this area."

"I had **no background in negotiating**³ so flew by the seat of my pants. It is about time AND start addressing the low salaries for dietitians. And would AND start a marketing campaign? After 30 years as a dietitian, I am **still having to explain what a RD is**⁶! If the public doesn't know how you expect the institutions, we work for to respect us!"

"Absolutely. It's been a huge shift with regards to learning how to charge what I am worth⁴ and learning how to change my mindset around money. I think that learning about this during my internship would have been invaluable³. The Academy has been a little helpful (salary reports)² but I think that various Facebook groups/dietitians on social media have been even more so."

"I tried to negotiate using the knowledge from the **Academy's salary calculator**². My hospital HR told me my master's degree means nothing and all of the hospitals in the area have an agreement on what to pay RDs. I was only able to negotiate an extra \$1/hr."

"Yes, I tried to negotiate my salary with the dean using the numbers from **the salary tool**² but they didn't feel like my role was able to be compared to those around the country. Also, **those who make the salary decision often don't fully understand our roles/profession**⁶. As part of salaries, the Academy needs to focus on **showing our worth and value with outcomes data**^{4,6}."

Bolded portions of quotes indicate author-identified themes of:

¹ Confidence

² Resources from The Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics

³ Lack of training

⁴ Worth

⁵ Gender gap

⁶ Perceived value (or lack thereof) of dietitians

DISCUSSION

A Three-Pronged Approach to Advancing Salary and Benefit Negotiation in Nutrition and Dietetics

Early Education

The survey results indicate that the profession has considerable room for improvement in S&B negotiations. Effective negotiation skills are critical and leveraging S&B is a crucial area that requires further education and continuous practice. Participants who were employed in clinical practice settings reported the lowest salary satisfaction, negotiation confidence, and negotiation success compared with all other practice areas. These practitioners account for the largest group that may benefit from salary-negotiation education. Encouragingly, this sample of clinicians was most interested in learning how to improve negotiation skills. It is of utmost importance that negotiation education be included in public health/nutrition, didactic programs in dietetics (DPD), and supervised practice programs of all design (e.g., future education model programs, coordinated programs, dietetic internships) leading to early exposure to S&B conversations and expectation management. Since clinical positions tend to be the most readily available to new RDs and are a wonderful way to expand entry-level skills, the focus should be on educating dietetic interns and graduates on negotiation strategies. Based on feedback from this study, new graduates and recent dietetic interns who received education on negotiation during their dietetic internship program reported the highest success in their first job interviews and negotiation conversations. Currently, only a handful of supervised practice programs provide education on topics related to the job-interview process. To aid in the provision of information, virtual education opportunities exist for students, interns, and practicing RDs.¹⁶ Ensuring that interns and new graduates are educated on negotiation

prior to entering the dietetics profession and *prior* to accepting a job is crucial. With the impending requirement for all entry-level dietitians to possess a master's degree, it will become even more crucial to show the increased value of our profession so that RDs may also improve return on educational investment.

In the private practice and business sectors, the results from this sample indicated that nutrition and dietetics professionals are attempting to learn how to negotiate. Johansson reported in *Entrepreneur* that young professionals in the US between the ages of 25 and 30 were more willing to negotiate for higher pay by 10-15% over the base, whereas those above 30 and younger than 25 years of age tended to not negotiate.¹⁷ Along with negotiating for higher pay, applicants were also willing to decline job opportunities if the desired salary was not provided. Additionally, in private practice, negotiation skills extend beyond those of S&B to negotiate with brands, facilities, and other industries. Nutrition and dietetics professionals are more willing to negotiate at a higher rate because of the perceived value of the contract and the perceived financial status of the business.¹⁸ This is where exposure to information and advocacy for the profession comes into play. The profession can unite and communicate more on salary and worth when negotiating with management and finding support through professional organizations and communities.

Exposure

Exposure is enhanced as transparent communication becomes more prominent, frequent, and eventually more commonplace. Resources for continuing education, such as online marketing, business courses, and professional training, should also be considered by nutrition-based professional organizations, in addition to advocacy efforts for the profession in the healthcare community. Current exposure in the form of online articles, podcasts, and videos⁹⁻¹³ are

only valuable if awareness of resources is widely known. Exposure is also closely related to early education of nutrition and dietetics students and interns in that case studies, mock interviews, and simulations of negotiations led by skilled experts in negotiation would add value and strength to dietetics and supervised practice programs. Supervised practice programs can institute a problem-solving approach in education and practice with the intent for both parties in the negotiation to achieve their underlying interests leading to a continued practice in collaboration for mutual gain among applicants and employers.¹⁹

Leveraging soft skills such as communication, leadership, emotional intelligence, and adaptability can improve negotiation skills in current dietetics practice. More opportunities to engage in education and training to improve skills needs to be readily available to students, interns, and members of the profession. Seeking out and utilizing available negotiation toolkits made for other health professions may provide transferable knowledge and skills to assist nutrition and dietetics professionals.

Empowerment

Lastly, empowerment can be achieved by equipping nutrition and dietetics professionals with higher confidence in their values, as well as being a unified voice to advocate for improved S&B. The culmination of education, exposure, and empowerment can lead to excellent negotiation skills. This, in turn, may lead to the nutrition profession realizing its value and, as a result, being rewarded accordingly at both the financial and professional levels.

LIMITATIONS

For the first time, there are data available about the lived experiences of nutrition and dietetics professionals regarding negotiation of S&B, with further information on the wants and needs of these professionals for future education and training. However, this study is

not without its limitations. The first is the small sample size compared to the entire population of over 120,000 nutrition and dietetics professionals in the United States.

Furthermore, the opinions expressed by our participants cannot be generalized to reflect the opinions of all nutrition and dietetics professionals in the United States. Another limitation is the inability to compare the findings to the other work due to a lack of literature on negotiation experiences, especially within the nutrition profession. Given the topic of the survey, those who have either experienced immense success and satisfaction with negotiation of S&B or great failure or dissatisfaction may have gravitated to participating to share their thoughts and feelings. The investigators acknowledge the possibility of the sample giving a biased perspective on S&B negotiation experiences.

If this study were to be replicated, improvements to the survey protocol would be needed to better capture a clear, more expansive, and diverse view of nutrition and dietetics professionals' thoughts, feelings, and experiences about negotiation of S&B. Increasing study sample size through expanding survey availability time, improving reach of study marketing, and more clearly emphasizing the importance of the study data to advocating for improved negotiation education efforts would strengthen future study conclusions and recommendations. Future research should focus on creation of a validated and reliable survey instrument to assess confidence, attitude, and experience with S&B negotiation in the nutrition and dietetics profession. Findings from this validated instrument could then inform future negotiation education tactics for professional organizations, supervised practice programs, or independent continuing education providers to employ. Negotiation education tactics developed from the information obtained in these surveys should then be assessed for success in real-world case reports obtained from a diverse sample of practicing nutrition professionals. Of note, adding a negotiation

expert or educator to the research team could help to create stronger items and overall assessment for research on this topic. Once the thoughts, feelings, and experiences of nutrition and dietetics professionals are thoroughly understood through future surveys and case reports, these findings should solidify strategies and resources for strengthening the S&B negotiation competencies of these professionals. The collective goal of continued research and information sharing about S&B negotiation in the nutrition and dietetics profession could lead to a better understanding of and stronger advocacy for the value of the profession from which all RDs may benefit.

CONCLUSION

This study analyzed thoughts, feelings, and experiences related to S&B negotiations among nutrition and dietetics professionals. As the first survey of its kind, the data provide key details and evidence for negotiations in our profession. The findings from this study highlight the importance of and desire for negotiation skills to improve S&B outcomes. By incorporating effective negotiation skills and strategies through education and training, nutrition and dietetics professionals can be better equipped to overcome barriers and achieve confidence in this crucial skill. Future efforts by nutrition-focused professional organizations should aim to create continuing education opportunities to advance skills and confidence in S&B negotiations, with tailored training for success in different practice areas of nutrition and dietetics. By incorporating effective negotiation skills and strategies through education and training, nutritional professionals can become better equipped to overcome barriers and achieve confidence in this crucial skill. This study provides a foundation for future negotiation-based interventions to improve the S&B among nutritional professionals. The culmination of this three-pronged approach of education, exposure, and empowerment could lead to negotiation-skill excellence in current dietetics

practice and, eventually, a world where our profession realizes our value and as a result is rewarded accordingly, both at the financial and therefore, professional level.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

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