

Alexandra (Alex) Kennedy, RDN
Registered Dietitian & Lead
Communications Specialist for the
Adult Bariatric Surgery Program



What is your job title?

Registered Dietitian & Lead Communications
Specialist for the Adult Bariatric Surgery Program

Where do you work?

Michigan Medicine, Ann Arbor

How long have you been at this job?

Almost 3 years

**Please describe your job (including typical role,
population served and anything else you feel is important in understanding the job):**

In my role I serve a patient population who is both seeking bariatric surgery, and those who have had bariatric surgery in the past. I am fortunate to work with patients just starting their journey and foster relationships with patients long-term. The role requires nutrition counseling and motivational interviewing, but also requires strong interpersonal skills and ability to empathize with patients and meet them where they are at.

Does your job require any additional schooling or education?

My current role requires a master's degree in a related field. Many dietitians in the weight management realm will also continue their education and obtain certificates in counseling and weight management (CSOWM).

What are possible places of employment for your position?

Most hospital systems have a bariatric surgery program, whether that be surgical or endoscopic procedures. These programs typically have several dietitians on staff. There are also many outpatient clinics, private practices, and surgery centers that provide bariatric services.

What is your favorite thing about your job?

Getting to know patients from start-to-finish. We typically meet patients at their most vulnerable, and we are able to encourage and support them long after surgery. Seeing changes in patients (outside of physical changes) is rewarding and being able to help them realize their health successes and value (outside the scale) is my favorite.

What is your least favorite thing about your job?

Charting. While it is a necessity, it can be extremely tedious and adds a lot of time on to the normal workday. Luckily, computers in patient rooms and virtual visits have made this incredibly easier.

Why/how did you choose your field and how did you get into it?

During graduate school, I was required to have a summer internship. I chose the bariatric program because I knew that I wanted to be in an outpatient area and wanted to counsel patients with weight management concerns. I loved my time so much that as soon as a position opened I applied immediately. The key thing here is to always put your best foot forward during your internship rotations and make professional relationships with your preceptors and coordinators!

What is your educational background (where did you go to school)?

I went to undergrad at the University of Detroit Mercy (Biology) and I went to graduate school at the University of Michigan (School of Public Health – Nutrition & Dietetics).

What is your job/work background?

Before returning to grad school, I actually worked in real estate and was in charge of marketing and listing homes for a large real estate company in Michigan. After graduating and receiving my RDN, I worked in research, nutrition consulting, corporate wellness, and now my current role at U of M.

Do you do any volunteer work?

I have not in a long time, as the pandemic has gotten in the way. In the past I have volunteered at Food Gatherers.

Why did you decide to become an RD?

I have always loved science AND food. I was intrigued by dietetics because it connected the scientific aspect of our bodies, nutrition, micronutrients to food and how it ultimately affects our bodies. I was drawn to this role because I wanted to help teach others about nutrition and learn more about the evidence-based information related to food/nutrition.

Why/how did you decide to pursue other credentials beyond the RD?

I noticed that many jobs for dietitians required a graduate-level degree, so I knew I would have to obtain my MPH in order to be a good candidate for certain roles.

What do you like and what do you not like about the field in general?

I like that we are all supportive of one another and we all have our own niche. Similar to practicing medicine, we all have our areas of expertise and most RDs are very happy to help one another learn about their specialty. Two things I don't like: the field is not diverse. I would love to see more RDs with different races, backgrounds, genders, and socioeconomic backgrounds. Diversity would strengthen our field tenfold. Second, I do find that many RDs in the field tend to give dietary information to patients/clients based on what works for them, rather than what works for the patient. Not every patient wants to be vegan. Not every patient wants to avoid gluten. We have to meet patients where they are at and educate them on different food options.

What do you think are the most important things for students and/or new RDs to know?

It is important to understand what you know, and what you don't know. This means: do not be afraid to ask questions! Do not be afraid to research something fully before giving advice. We are the experts, and you have to be confident in knowing that even if you don't know the exact answer off-hand, you know where to find it!

What areas in dietetics do you think will become more important/growing in the future?

I definitely think the area of personalized nutrition will grow in the future as well as nutrition related to the microbiome. We are learning more and more information about both of these, and truly means that nutrition is not "one size fits all."

Tell us more about yourself/anything interesting you'd like to share!

Despite being a dietitian and talking about food all day – I am an awful cook. Luckily, the past several months I have improved my skills (thanks to being stuck at home). Now my food is at least edible!