

Kayla M. Bridges, DCN, RD-AP, CNSC, FAND NICU Dietitian



What is your job title?

Clinical Dietitian Specialist/Milk Room Coordinator

Where do you work (setting and/or company)?

Beaumont Children's

How long have you been at this job?

4 years, 2 months

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

I work in the neonatal intensive care unit, serving infants born prematurely as well as critically ill term newborns. My role is managing the enteral and parenteral nutrition of infants admitted to the NICU. I collaboratively create and maintain our feeding protocols. I am responsible for ensuring that our nutrition practices are consistent with the most up-to-date research. I also played an integral role in the design and implementation of our centralized infant feeding preparation room and process. I oversee four nurse technicians who work in this role.

Does your job require any additional schooling or education?

This type of job typically requires a graduate degree, prior training in pediatrics and/or critical care nutrition support, and a nutrition support (CNSC) certification.

What are possible places of employment for your position?

Primary place of employment for this position is the hospital setting, although there are opportunities to use this degree in public health or outpatient transitional settings. Dietitians specializing in neonatal nutrition may also have roles or employment in academic/research settings as well as in the pharmaceutical/infant formula industry.

What is your favorite thing about your job?

I love being able to make a difference in people's lives. Also, I love that I have a dynamic role that allows me to function autonomously in many aspects.

What is your least favorite thing about your job?

My role is highly specialized, so it either requires extensive training/experience for coverage or constantly being "on-call".

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

I originally wanted to work with eating disorder patients. Since these were mostly pediatric patients, the pediatric RD at my first job trained me to take over her inpatient floor coverage when she went part-time. I soon realized that working with eating disorder patients hit too close to home - I knew the battle all too well (see question 14). The NICU dietitian at this hospital knew I had research experience with LCPUFAs and asked for my opinion on IV lipid substitutes during a product shortage. These events surprisingly led me to the niche field of neonatal nutrition support.

What is your educational background?

BS – Dietetics/Health Promotion - Michigan State University

MS – Nutritional Sciences/Biochemistry – West Virginia University

Dietetic Internship – West Virginia University (coordinated graduate program)

DCN – Doctor of Clinical Nutrition – Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey

What is your job/work background?

My first job out of grad school/dietetic internship was at Carilion Roanoke Memorial Hospital in Roanoke, VA. I covered oncology and pediatrics/PICU/neonatal intermediate care, as well as the psychiatric hospital across the street (pediatric psych unit, intensive care psych, stepdown psych). I then worked in adult ICU for just under a year before transitioning to a full-time NICU position at St. John Hospital & Medical Center in Detroit, MI early 2012. I worked as the lead clinical dietitian specialist for the children's hospital for four years before moving to my current role at Beaumont Children's.

Do you do any volunteer work?

I volunteer for the Michigan Society for Parenteral and Enteral Nutrition (current president), American Society for Parenteral and Enteral Nutrition (clinical practice committee), and the Pediatric Nutrition Practice Group of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics (newsletter editor). I also do some volunteer pediatric lectures for West Virginia University's dietetic internship.

Why did you decide to become an RD?

As a former nationally/internationally competitive figure skater, I battled a severe eating disorder and spent a collective 6 months in residential treatment during my teenage years. I promised myself that if I ever fully recovered, I would spend the rest of my life using that obsessively acquired nutrition knowledge to help others and give back to the community. I thankfully made the 1 in 10 statistic of my time. So, here I am! 😊

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

In all honesty, I had too much fun at Michigan State University for the sake of my GPA, and coordinated MS internship programs were less competitive back then. Specialty certifications were required for work and salary advancement. I took the RD-AP exam because my advisor at Rutgers piloted the credential and suggested I take it the first round. I pursued the FAND credential so I could stop taking so many exams every 5 years – that one is permanent.

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

I like that dietetics has grown tremendously as a profession in the past decade. I dislike the starting salary ranges for clinical dietitians, in general, although it has improved slightly over the years.

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

Don't give up if you don't match for an internship or don't get your dream job right away! I accidentally filled out the wrong West Virginia internship code on my application and got matched via "scramble"...luckily I had been accepted to the grad school and they still had a spot for me!

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

Sports nutrition, Nutrition Informatics, Nutrition Research, Genetic Nutrition, Integrative/Functional Nutrition.

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

Fun fact – my niece Ellie was a 31-week preemie (picture) and came to Beaumont NICU the same week I did!

Less fun fact - I JUST finished my doctorate degree this month. I look forward to traveling more frequently to warm tropical places in the middle of Michigan winter and coaching figure skating 😊