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Sent by: [Redacted]

To: <Ryan\_mclean@moh.govt.nz>  
cc: [Redacted]  
bcc: [Redacted]

23/01/08 04:37 pm

Subject: Health Practitioners Competency Assurance Act

Hallo Ryan

Thank you for agreeing to consider my submission on the Health Practitioners Competency Assurance act.

I am a NZ registered Dietitian working in Public Health. My concern is not about the competency of dietitians, but of others who offer nutrition advice in the same way as a dietitian. The public do not make the distinction between a dietitian, who is covered by the HPCA act, and someone calling themselves a "nutritionist", who is not. Misinformation and recommendations not appropriate for the New Zealand situation are often given by non dietitians calling themselves "nutritionists" or "nutrition consultants". Conflicting information is confusing and frustrating for the New Zealand public, and in some cases can be dangerous.

There is one instance where a cookbook containing inappropriate nutrition advice and targeting parents of young children has been recommended as a reference volume for GPs. The inaccurate advice in this book, if followed by parents, could lead to significant nutrition related conditions. Parents have the right to expect that such published information follows the MOH Food & Nutrition Guidelines.

Dietetic advice and Nutrition advice can be the same thing. Presently someone can claim to be a nutritionist or nutrition consultant and give nutrition advice without being covered by the HPCA act because the act covers Dietitians and dietetic advice and the perpetrator is not claiming to be a dietitian.

My submission is that there needs to be a safeguard for the public to prevent the dissemination of nutrition misinformation by non qualified individuals. I suggest that consideration be given to include the regulation of nutritionists in the HPCA act. A nutritionist is generally recognised as someone who has an undergraduate science degree with a major in human nutrition. All persons giving nutrition advice could then be construed as being, or implying they were nutritionists and would thus be covered by the act. The act would then have the teeth to safeguard the NZ public from potentially harmful nutrition (as well as dietetic) messages.

Regards

Jenny Coleman  
NZ Registered Dietitian

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