### **What is a Preceptor?**

A "preceptor" is an expert or specialist, such as a Registered Dietitian/Registered Dietitian Nutritionist, who provides guidance, practical experience and training to a Dietetic Intern. In years gone by, all preceptors in Dietetic Internships were required to be Registered Dietitians. That is no longer the case. A preceptor should be someone involved with the field of nutrition and dietetics in some way, who is in a position to help guide your experience in the internship at the local level (where you live, or a place you want to travel to) and help arrange experiences to help you meet expectations of your program. Sometimes interns do short placements (1 day – 1 week) to gain experience in a specific area of interest, or an area of practice not covered in their other rotations.

### **Who can be a Preceptor?**

* Registered Dietitians Nutritionists  (RD / RDN)
* Licensed Dietitians (LD), Certified Dietitians (CDN)
* Nutritionists
* Registered Nurses (RN), Nurse Practitioners (NP), Clinical Nurse Specialist (CNS)
* Midwives & Lactation Consultants
* Physician Assistants
* Food Service Directors (schools, hospitals, nursing homes)
* Pharmacists
* Licensed Social Workers, Licensed Psychologists
* Certified Diabetes Educators
* Physical Therapists, Occupational Therapists, Speech/Language Pathologists
* Program Directors
* Administrators (such as in a nursing home, assisted living, a senior center with a lunch program)
* MDs, NDs, ODs with substantial nutrition practices.

**Please note** that a clinical preceptor does not have to be in a large hospital. It needs to be somewhere where MNT and Clinical Care Process are practiced. The goal is to have access with a wide variety of patients in different disease states. Two or more sites may be combined to create a clinical rotation. A facility that does long term care, or extended care and has a rehab unit for younger patients can be a good option. Smaller community hospitals are also often happy to have interns. Ideally one portion of your clinical internship will be done in a residential facility.

**Below is a list of possible clinical rotation sites:**

* Outpatient clinic
* Dialysis clinic
* Cancer clinic
* LTC/Rehab
* PT clinic with an RD
* Weight loss clinic
* Physician Practices
* Health centers
* Community Health clinics

**NOTE:** Keep in mind that the requirement for the rotation is that the clinical preceptor must be an RD, even though you may work in collaboration with other professionals in that facility. If you have questions, as the internship director.

Regardless of the discipline, all credentials and experience will be evaluated for appropriateness and relevance to the rotation and experiences the Intern will be completing.

**Minimum requirements of the preceptors:**

* Preceptor must be a registered dietitian (RD) or other qualified professional with appropriate credentials and experience depending on the site and the competencies to be met.
* Preceptor must be able to document appropriate continuing education for the previous two years.
* Preceptor must have adequate time to provide required supervision of the intern.
* Note: “primary preceptor” is an individual who will keep a file of the interns, who will affirm the hours of supervised-practice that the intern completes, and who will maintain appropriate contact with the internship director and the intern. If your primary preceptor is not an RD, they will need to arrange for you to be supervised by RDs to gain needed experiences.

**Do my preceptors need to be RDs/RDNs?**

It is great to have preceptors who are RD/Ns, but it is not necessary for every rotation. There are some experiences that you are required to complete, which must be supervised by registered dietitians. This is especially true in your clinical rotation, when you are practicing the Nutrition Care Process and Medical Nutrition Therapy. However your primary preceptor may be a member of a team that is involved in nutrition and dietetics issues with patients, clients, or businesses and may act as a “primary preceptor” helping you find an RD preceptor to work with on MNT and Nutrition Care Process.

**Minimum requirements of the sponsoring facilities:**

* If eligible for accreditation the facility must be accredited by The Joint Commission (TJC), the state agency, or other relevant accrediting body. Note some community/food service/elective sites may not be reliable for accreditation, and therefore accreditation is not a requirement. Check with your internship director.
* Any facility at which the intern would complete 40 hours or more of practice experience must have a preceptor available on staff.
* Any facility at which the intern would complete more than 40 hours or one week must have a signed Affiliation Agreement with Garden to Table Nutrition.
* Any facility, at which the intern would complete more than one-week rotation, must have sufficient educational resources to support an intern’s educational needs such as computer or appropriate space for interns to work on their assignments.
* If a facility is unable to provide all the experiences needed by the intern to meet ACEND standards, then the intern can work with the internship director to find another way to get the need experiences required.

### **I want to apply to a Distance Dietetic Internship.** **When should I start looking for a Preceptor?**

**It is NEVER TOO EARLY**to start inquiring, such as at the completion of a summer job in Nutrition and Dietetics or after volunteer work, even in your sophomore or junior year.

**Your program application should include at least two identified preceptors, including at least one clinical receptor. Students who have not identified at least two preceptors are less likely to be accepted to Garden to Table Nutrition Dietetic Internship.**

* + The Clinical preceptor must be an RD.
  + The Food Service preceptor must be a food service administrator, such as a Food Service Director or Food Service Manager.
  + The Community preceptor may be an RD, a credentialed professional, or a manager/directorin a program in which nutrition and food related services are a major component of the program.
  + Elective**–** May or may not be an RD.

### **Will Garden to Table Nutrition find a Preceptor for me?**

The Garden to Table Nutrition Internship will be able to help you determine whether a preceptor is acceptable and will help with other leads, after you have been accepted to the program. The internship director has the final decision on whether a particular preceptor is acceptable, but it is your responsibility to find your own preceptors. The extent to which it appears that you have found preceptors will be part of the selection criteria for the program.

### **How can I find a Preceptor?**

* Since you are applying to a program that requires you to find your own preceptors, you may have to use some imagination to find people willing to help you.
* You must have at least two potential preceptors already identified to be admitted to the program (see above).
* Talk with your DPD advisor and your DPD Program Director and other academic advisors, professors and your state dietetic association and ask for their assistance in locating preceptors.
* Talk with students a year ahead of you who are doing or have done internship programs, they may be able to put you in touch with their preceptors.
* You might want to start by contacting someone for whom you have worked in the past or someone in a place where you have volunteered and explain to them what you are trying to accomplish. We suggest that you try to find out names and personalize your requests rather than send blanket e-mails “to whom it may concern”. You may want to ask friends and family about people they may know. It might help to show them this document.
* Cold calling (just calling from a list of RDs found online who have not necessarily shown an interest in preceptoring) NOTE: Some interns have found that large hospitals that already have agreements with university-based Internship programs may not be willing/able to host interns from other programs. You may be more successful reaching out to RDs at smaller community hospitals, or in areas without university programs.
* The accrediting body of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics maintains a list of RDs who have indicated that they are willing to be preceptors. You may find the list on the “Find a Preceptor” link on the ACEND section on eatright.org/pro, if you are a Student Member.
* Professional organizations of any kind.
* Consider traveling to places where preceptors are easier to find. This could be a great time to stay with relatives where preceptors are willing to accept an intern.
* Dream a little – what draws you to the field of nutrition? Look for opportunities to explore your passions and your dream job – maybe it is working at a residential health spa, or finding better ways to feed the homeless, or working with the Edible SchoolYard, or working with Share Our Strength helping the poor learn how to improve their health through cooking and gardening, or working with Cancer Patients, or traveling to an Eco Village where 90% of the food eaten is grown on site. These may be great options especially for your elective. Some of these options may even provide you with housing.
* If someone is leaning toward agreeing to be a preceptor but has questions that you cannot answer to their satisfaction, you may have them call or email the internship director.

### **I have identified my preceptors. Now what should I do?**

After you have been accepted into the program, you will need to have each preceptor submit a completed preceptor form online. This link is provided **after** admission to the program. The preceptor should complete the form online and attach his/her resume and brief record of continuing education activitiesto the online form. This form serves as documentation that the preceptor has agreed to precept you and provides the information that we need to determine that the preceptor has the appropriate credentials. There will also be some additional paperwork needed from your preceptor, such as the affiliation agreement.

### **What is a “practice site”?**

The practice site/ facility is an organization or business that provides the opportunity for the intern to complete the required supervised practice such as a hospital, nursing home, assisted living, private practice, clinic, public health agency, neighborhood health center, university dining center, home care company, school system, nutrition or food related business.

### **What is an affiliation agreement or contract?**

## An affiliation agreement is a contract that is required between Garden to Table Nutrition and the practice site/facility. **These agreements will be completed after** they **have been granted an internship and before the Intern can start the supervised practice/internship.** Occasionally some facilities prefer to use their own version of an agreement, in which case Garden to Table Nutrition attempts to work together to reach agreement.

## **Please note: Not all affiliation agreements can be successfully negotiated, which case you may have to find a new practice site.**