

Full and Part Time Staff

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Ministry of Community and Social Services  
**Minister Sandra Pupatello, Minister of Community and Social Services**  
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Dear Minister Pupatello:

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RE: New special diet application forms

We are Registered Dietitians and Registered Social Workers in the Nephrology department at Sunnybrook & Women's College Health Sciences Centre. We have come together to address the significant changes in the Special Diets Application, both in procedure and in policy.

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This year, we, as dietitians, had difficulty completing the applications due to insufficient information that was provided. Our concerns are as follows:

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1. Oral supplements and vitamin/mineral supplementation. There is no area on the new form to indicate that a patient requires an oral or vitamin/mineral supplement. Many of our patients benefit from oral supplements and were receiving assistance through the special diets allowance for these supplements in the past. As patients on dialysis lose water-soluble vitamins during dialysis, they require supplementation. Additionally, calcium supplements are often used as phosphate binders in our patients. There needs to be a section to allow for coverage of oral and/or vitamin/mineral supplementation.
2. Certifying signatures. On the new diet application form signatures are no longer required next to each medical condition requiring a special diet. Due to liability concerns there should be space for signatures.
3. Medical conditions need to be defined, as they are too general. The previous form classified diet based on specific dietary restrictions/needs. This method clearly illustrated nutrients that needed to be addressed. The current form is very ambiguous, as it does not define what dietary restrictions are required for the respective medical condition. Additionally, we need some clarification as to how certain medical conditions are defined on the form; e.g. hyperlipidemia and hypercholesterolemia.
4. We are also concerned about the amount of financial assistance now offered to special diet recipients. It appears that the assistance provided has decreased despite no change in special diet requirements. How have these new allowances been calculated if medical conditions remain the same?

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In our opinion, the new OSDP forms are further compromising the nutritional and financial needs of our patients. We feel that these new forms require revision to more accurately address

medical/nutritional concerns. Medical conditions requiring special diets are very individualized and this form does not allow for this individualization.

As Social Workers in the Dialysis Program at Sunnybrook Hospital in Toronto, we work with multiple people on ODSP, specifically, numerous people who benefit from the ODSP dietary supplement. We were highly surprised and disappointed when we learned that the dietary supplement funding decreased for individuals receiving it. We are joining our dietary colleagues in advocating for a return to the previous levels of funding.

As we know you can appreciate, dialysis patients often have multiple medical conditions, which prevent them, or reduce their, ability to work. They are left with minimal to no income, thus end up requiring ODSP. ODSP is an invaluable Ministry initiative and we realize that social assistance in Ontario is being reshaped, but it should not be done so at the expense of those already benefiting from it, those that have grown accustomed to its benefits. We cannot begin to reduce the funding allocated when it is already limited to begin with.

Even with ODSP coverage, patients remain in financial need. In our day-to-day interventions with them, financial need is at the top of their list of concerns. Our government needs to support these people already plagued with multiple medical problems, thus higher prioritized concerns. We cannot add another problem to their already burdened coping abilities. Dialysis patients have very unique and necessary diets, therefore we cannot reduce the funding they receive to support and maintain their health. There are no other financial supports available to them, to meet these special needs.

We are very concerned about the impact of these new special diet forms. We implore the Ministry to reconsider the reduction and generalization of these funds.

We look forward to a reply to our concerns. We may be collectively reached via the Dialysis Program at Sunnybrook Hospital. The address can be found at the bottom of this letterhead.

Sincerely,

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Dorothy Allen, RD  
Renal Dietitian

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Julie Burnett, MSW, RSW  
Renal Social Worker

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Gulnar Damji, RD  
Renal Dietitian

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