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NUTRITION AUTHORITY

*Perspectives on
Opportunity*

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with Jane Grant Tougas

 Academy of Nutrition
and Dietetics

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Contents

ABOUT THE AUTHOR	vi
FOREWORD.....	ix
PREFACE	xi
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	xiv
Introduction	1
History.....	4
Science.....	5
New Frontiers	6
Section One: <i>Discovery Through the Lens of History</i>	9
Changemakers	13
The Value of History	24
The Impact of World Wars	27
<i>World War I</i>	27
<i>Post–World War I</i>	33

<i>World War II</i>	34
<i>Post–World War II</i>	38
Legacy of Social Change	39
<i>The Progressive Era</i>	39
<i>Feminism</i>	41
<i>The Great Society</i>	45
<i>Medicare and Medicaid</i>	46
<i>Senate Select Committee on Nutrition and Human Needs</i>	48
Consequences of Economic Revolution	52
Section Two: Science: The Foundation of Our Profession	59
Understanding Evidence	63
Research Under Scrutiny	74
Improving Nutrition Research.....	76
Crafting and Delivering Messages With Authority	81
Section Three: New Frontiers: Applying Research to Achieve Our Vision	91
The Food System	96
Information Technology	112
<i>Telehealth</i>	115

<i>What Makes Data “Big”?</i>	116
<i>Artificial Intelligence</i>	120
Personalized Nutrition	121
Research: The Foundation for the Future	127
Epilogue	135
Knowledge, Communication, and Collaboration: Essential Elements	136
History, Science, and New Frontiers: My Hopes for the Profession	137
CONTINUING PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION.....	140

About the Author

Susan Finn, PhD, RDN, FAND is a recognized leader and a respected communicator in food, nutrition, and health. As a top-level advisor to professional societies, educational institutions, governmental bodies, and industry professionals, Dr Finn evaluates, interprets, and brings context to nutrition research and its implications.

After graduating with a bachelor of science degree in education from Bowling Green State University, Dr Finn went on to earn a master of science degree in public health nutrition at Case Western Reserve University and a PhD in nutrition science from The Ohio State University. Both Ohio State and Bowling Green have honored her with distinguished alumni awards.

For nearly 30 years, Dr Finn headed nutrition services for the Ross Products Division of Abbott Laboratories (now Abbott Nutrition), where she advocated for making nutrition screening and support integral elements of health care. She was the chief architect behind multifaceted campaigns to advance nutrition

support, particularly for women, the elderly, and those with diseases placing them at nutritional risk.

Dr Finn has served as president of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, the largest organization of nutrition and dietetics practitioners in the world, which supports more than 100,000 credential practitioners. She has also served as chair of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics Foundation. Dr Finn remains deeply involved in championing dietetics professionals as nutrition authorities. She has received the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics Medallion Award, presented the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics prestigious Distinguished Lecture Award (formerly the Lenna Frances Cooper Memorial Lecture Award), and has received the Lifetime Achievement Award (formerly the Marjorie Hulsizer Copher Award), the highest honor bestowed by the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics. As cochair of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics Second Century Initiative, she has been intimately involved in shaping the organization's future direction. Over the past several years, Dr Finn has focused on strengthening the authority of registered dietitians as the profession moves into its second century, effectively communicating food and nutrition science, and exploring the intersection of food, nutrition, agriculture, and sustainability.

Dr Finn serves on the board of the Royal Academy of Science International Trust and participated in the inaugural World Women's Health and Development Forum at the United Nations. As a result of this initiative, the United Nations General Assembly adopted a groundbreaking resolution to establish an annual International Day of Women and Girls in Science.

Dr Finn has been honored for her leadership in health and nutrition. President George W. Bush appointed Dr Finn to the President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports. In 2014, then Speaker of the House John Boehner appointed Dr Finn to the National Commission on Hunger, which assessed the hunger crisis in this country and recommended how government along with private and public partners could respond.

Dr Finn is widely published in professional journals and consumer magazines. She is coauthor of two books: *The Real Life Nutrition Book: Making the Right Food Choices Without Changing Your Lifestyle* published by Penguin Books and *The American Dietetic Association Guide to Women's Nutrition for Healthy Living* published by Perigee.

Foreword

I HAD THE GOOD FORTUNE OF MEETING SUSAN FINN WHILE we were both pursuing our PhD degrees at The Ohio State University. As Dr Finn was completing her PhD in 1972, I was beginning to work on mine.

I have followed her amazing career for several decades. Without question, Dr Finn has been a trailblazer, making significant contributions to policy, corporate nutrition, higher education, and the nonprofit sector. She is highly respected as a leading nutrition authority and strategist. In recognition of her many accomplishments, the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics has honored her with the prestigious Marjorie Hulsizer Copher Award, the highest honor they bestow. Similarly, both The Ohio State University and Bowling Green University have recognized her as an outstanding graduate.

I can say with complete confidence that Dr Finn's book *Nutrition Authority: Perspectives on Opportunity* should be required reading for all students who aspire to a career in food, nutrition, and dietetics.

In the first section, Dr Finn focuses on one of her favorite topics: history. She emphasizes that understanding the past is key to navigating the future and demonstrates the concept by highlighting significant historical events that laid the foundation for the food, nutrition, and dietetics profession.

Dr Finn then turns her attention to the importance of understanding nutrition science in the second section. Asking the right questions and vigorously pursuing meaningful answers are the building blocks of our profession, and they are essential to being a credible and influential authority.

In the third section, Dr Finn explores the complexity of food systems. Understanding the elements of global food systems and their synergy empowers food, nutrition, and dietetics professionals to think comprehensively about their contributions to health along a broad spectrum of opportunities. In addition, as the profession entered its second century in 2017, using technology to expertly deploy information is fundamental to assuming our rightful place as an authoritative voice and to communicating effectively with colleagues and consumers.

I hope you find *Nutrition Authority: Perspectives on Opportunity* an inspiring read and an incentive to move the food, nutrition, and dietetics profession forward.

*Judy Bonner, RDN, PhD
28th President of the University of Alabama
50-Year Member of the Academy of
Nutrition and Dietetics*

Preface

WHY DID I WRITE THIS BOOK? THIS IS AN EASY QUESTION for me to answer: I wrote *Nutrition Authority: Perspectives on Opportunity* as an expression of my dedication and commitment to the profession of food, nutrition, and dietetics. I hope my words motivate nutrition and dietetics students, registered dietitians, and dietetic technicians newly entering the profession, and seasoned professionals to take on challenges and new opportunities that reflect our authority on these fronts.

My appreciation for our profession runs deep. My registered dietitian nutritionist (RDN) friends and colleagues have always been a source of strength and inspiration for me. The principles and values of the profession encourage me to do good work and strive for the best. My work with the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics has given me leadership opportunities that remain invaluable in all aspects of my life. I wrote this book because I want to share my perspective on things I've learned along the way. What I say here is not the only possible interpretation; it's simply my point of view. I know that some people will not agree with me.

I have spent most of my career in the corporate setting, even though I didn't start out in that direction. My first job was in public health with Project Head Start, then I moved on to work in education at Whittier College and The Ohio State University. After retiring from a 30-year career at Abbott Nutrition, I led the American Council for Fitness and Nutrition, a nonprofit food industry collaborative to raise awareness about obesity. All these experiences were formative and have helped shape my views about what makes an authority and a leader. I have worked with amazing people who showed me how to turn challenges into opportunities and become a voice that people listen to.

My approach to this book included citing relevant literature from experts and sharing diverse viewpoints to remind us how important it is to understand an issue or challenge, appreciate other people's perspectives, and strive to see the big picture.

As I developed each section of the book—history, science, and new frontiers—I realized how interconnected these areas are and how they have shaped who we are today and will be in the future. I believe we are now witnessing how nutrition science and public health can develop effective strategies to work together to improve health. And I certainly believe our profession can lead these efforts.

I hope this book will encourage you to look at your work from different perspectives and seek challenges that move our profession into new spaces, as some of the new leaders in our field are doing. Fresh opportunities are emerging, and what you do matters to the future of nutrition and dietetics. You are critical

PREFACE

to attracting the best and the brightest to our profession and to promoting diversity in Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics membership. All of us have a responsibility to position RDNs and the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics as leading voices in food, nutrition, and dietetics.

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Acknowledgments

WRITING A BOOK IS A TASK NO ONE ACCOMPLISHES ALONE. I have many to thank for their assistance on *Nutrition Authority: Perspectives on Opportunity*. First, my gratitude goes out to the dietitians and subject matter experts I interviewed, most of whom I have known over my career. I appreciate their allowing me to tap into their wisdom.

I also want to thank the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics for its leadership and for providing a wide range of resources for this book. I am grateful for the friendship and counsel of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics executive team, especially Pat Babjak, CEO, and Mary Beth Whalen, COO and executive director of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics Foundation. Jennifer Herendeen, senior director of clinical content and strategy, and Betsy Hornick, MS, RDN, director of practice publications, provided advice and guidance invaluable to making *Nutrition Authority: Perspectives on Opportunity* relevant to practicing registered dietitian nutritionists.

In addition, I want to thank Deborah McBride, an accomplished editor of scientific manuscripts, a former Academy of

Nutrition and Dietetics publisher, and a friend with whom I have worked closely over the years. I especially want to thank Jane Grant Tougas. (You will notice her name on the title page.) Jane is a talented writer, editor, and strategist. After 30-plus years of working together, she and I are in sync.

Finally, I owe a debt of gratitude to my family. My son, John, a philosopher and historian, brought a critical eye to the manuscript. My husband, Jim, has always been part of my professional life. Over the past several decades, Jim has participated with me in the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics annual Food & Nutrition Conference & Expo (FNCE), shared my friendships with colleagues, supported Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics programs, and given sage advice on food and nutrition messaging. Jim was instrumental in helping me write this book by sharing his views on content, format, and—most importantly—by encouraging me when I didn't think I would ever finish the work.

Thank you all for your inspiration and support.

Susan Calvert Finn, PhD, RDN, FAND

From the Publisher

The Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics would also like to thank the following reviewers for contributing their time, perspectives, and expertise during the development of this book:

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Introduction

SINCE THE EARLY 1900S, FOOD AND NUTRITION PROFESSIONALS^{*} have contributed to important advances in nutrition intervention, nutrition research, food and nutrition policy, and food safety standards.

Regardless of specialty and career path, the questions for the profession—and for you as a practitioner—are the same: How will we make our mark and shape nutrition care for the future? What must we do to grow and promote our authority as trusted professionals? And how do we leverage that authority into dynamic leadership?

Much has been written about authority, and many words are used to describe it. Merriam-Webster dictionary defines authority as “the power to influence or command thought, opinion, or behavior.” As simple as this definition seems, the concept of authority is far more complex. In its multifaceted forms, authority is deeply

* The terms *food and nutrition professionals*, *registered dietitian nutritionist*, *nutrition professional*, and *nutrition and dietetics professional* are used interchangeably throughout this book.

bound to trust, belief, and credibility—all of which underpin nutrition authority. These connections must be built over time by each of us as individuals and by the profession as a whole.

Being an authority in food and nutrition means being firmly grounded in science. In a world with instantaneous access to information, scientific expertise is challenged every minute. An explosion of information—only some of which is valid—creates confusion. Today, anyone can use their own interpretations (or misinterpretations) of science to present themselves as a nutrition authority. We see this daily as social media give a highly visible platform to users with differing views on food and nutrition.

Controversial issues (such as the amounts of fat, sugar, and salt to consume) continue to come under intense scrutiny, while newer controversies surrounding plant-based vs meat-based diets, processed vs fresh foods, and sustainability have entered the fray. We have the responsibility and unprecedented opportunity to break through this noise and elevate registered dietitian nutritionists (RDNs) as scientific, rational, trustworthy authorities. Practitioners must listen carefully to the customer, examine the science supporting what is factual and what is not, and provide the best advice, which require a clear focus and a united voice from our profession.

Academics who write about authority distinguish between *formal* authority, which rests on knowledge of facts that are understandable and explainable, and *moral* authority, which depends on the ability to demonstrate credibility and inspire trust.¹ Moral authority is the term used to describe the persuasive aspect of authority. Formal authority can be grabbed, assumed, elected, or

appointed; moral authority, however, must be earned through garnering—not demanding—respect.

Formal authority and moral authority can work in tandem. For example, evidence supporting the causes, prevention, and treatment of type 2 diabetes mellitus is well documented, constituting formal authority based on knowledge. Persuading people to manage their diabetes by losing weight, exercising, and not smoking, however, depends on the patient's perception of the practitioner's decision-making autonomy, credibility, and, thus, trustworthiness—in other words, the practitioner's moral authority.

As nutrition science has progressed, the profession's authority—both formal and moral—has grown in significance and impact. Our profession started in hospital kitchens, where dietitians with little or no professional recognition provided food services first for patients in hospitals in the late 1800s and then for troops during World War I.

Today, our profession includes sought-after experts in research, disease treatment, sports nutrition, agribusiness, and more. Klaus Schwab, founder and executive chairman of the World Economic Forum, notes²:

From the perspective of human history, there has never been a time of greater promise or potential peril. My concern, however, is that decision-makers are too often caught in traditional, linear (and nondisruptive) thinking or too absorbed by immediate concerns to think strategically about the forces of disruption and innovation shaping our future.

As RDNs, we must think about how to position our jobs in an ever-changing food, health, and wellness environment. To succeed, we must bring a bold vision forward to ensure nutrition professionals are positioned as authoritative voices. Achieving this goal demands our efforts as individuals and as a united profession.

As I wrote this book, I organized my thoughts into three pillars—history, science, and new frontiers—as a useful structure for a broad exploration of our profession. Such exploration provides a more nuanced understanding, which, in turn, enables us to strengthen our position. Throughout the book, you'll find my point of view as well as various other perspectives from respected literature. I also conducted interviews with experts, some of whom work outside the profession and offer valuable points of view and advice from different fields. Most interviews were with dietitians who have made—and continue to make—significant contributions.

HISTORY

I have always valued history, as is attested to by the many history books and commentary in my home. I'm especially intrigued by stories about women who blazed new trails, such as those who secured the right to vote and those, in particular, who established our profession on October 18, 1917, in Cleveland, OH.*

As a profession, our history and our future are both deeply intertwined with the women's rights movement, social justice

* Cleveland, OH, happens to be my hometown, and I was born on the anniversary of the founding of the profession!

movements, and the continued need for qualified people from many backgrounds in nutrition and research. Two major efforts will build and strengthen our profession: attracting people from under-represented groups to STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) professions, including nutrition science, and bringing greater diversity to our ranks. Efforts to increase inclusion, diversity, equity, and access in our profession are central to attracting and retaining inspiring new voices and leaders.³

SCIENCE

Science is the foundation for our authority. In the midst of widespread confusion about nutrition, people want to know what *we* believe. It is up to us to communicate sound science effectively by presenting what we currently know, as well as what is up for debate.

One outstanding example of this essential communication is the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics almost 40-year-old spokespeople program. The volunteer RDNs who comprise this corps provide reliable advice to the media and consumers, balancing the results of seemingly conflicting studies and translating nutrition science into language consumers can easily understand. One pioneer in this program is multi-award-winning broadcast journalist and cookbook author Carolyn O’Neil, MS, RDN, who over several decades went from popular print journalism to producing, writing, and anchoring CNN’s news segments *On the Menu* and *Travel Now*.

Now more than ever, we need to ramp up our outreach in all areas of dietetics practice and take the lead in analyzing evidence, recognizing bias, reporting conclusions honestly, and suggesting where findings might lead. This is what it means to be a science-based profession.

NEW FRONTIERS

It is impossible to be an authority unless you are willing to look at the future and embrace change—or even create it. Early in my career in the corporate sector, I saw the importance of change and the critical nature of moving forward when the window of opportunity opens. When I was at Abbott Nutrition (then Ross Laboratories), Nobel laureate Maurice Maeterlinck's words were displayed prominently in the president's office: "At every crossroads on the path that leads to the future, tradition has placed 10,000 men to guard the past." This reminder about the role of change, as well as its challenges, is as applicable today as it was at the beginning of my career. While we acknowledge the value of past achievements, we must break through barriers that hold us back from embracing and leading change.

As you read this book, my hope is that you will ask yourself questions such as: What is my role today? How has my role changed over time? What tools will I need to advance my career? What will my future look like as I join other RDNs and professional colleagues to lead the profession in the decades to come?

Where and for whom can I make the greatest difference to ensure parity in our profession and in the care we provide?

My hope is that *Nutrition Authority* will stimulate discussion in classrooms, workplaces, and wherever dietitians have opportunities to reflect on the future.

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