

# Message From the Chairperson



Laura Holden, MBA, RD, CSR, FNKF

**T**HIS ISSUE MARKS my first message as Chairperson of the Council on Renal Nutrition (CRN). Previously, I served CRN as an Alternate Region Representative, Region Representative, Secretary, and most recently as Chairperson-Elect. Along the way I served with and met many wonderful Renal Dietitians, and am indebted to them for all their wisdom and advice. It is a great honor to serve as your Chairperson, and I will tell you a little about my background in renal nutrition.

I came to renal nutrition unexpectedly. I had been working in a large metropolitan hospital for several years when that institution underwent a reduction in force. As a result of this reduction, my position was eliminated and I was unexpectedly unemployed. One of my colleagues, who had had the responsibility of providing nutrition coverage on the renal floor of this hospital, heard of my impending lay-off and called me. She told me she knew of an opening at a nearby dialysis unit, encouraged me to apply, and called the lead dietitian at this and gave me a recommendation. I interviewed the next day for this position, and before the lay-off took effect, I had a job at the dialysis unit to go to. All this happened over 27 years ago, and I am forever grateful to my colleague for her support and recommendation as this changed the course of my life.

Since that time, I have worked exclusively in the renal field, have been responsible for both peritoneal and hemodialysis patients, and have served in dialysis units in the inner city and suburbs, as well as covered units in rural Arizona. My company has changed names, merged twice, been sold twice, and divested twice. Despite all this flux, the diversity of our patient population has never ceased to amaze me. Often in my inner city units when I ask patients “How often do you go out to eat” I receive a response of “daily” or “at least once a week.” When I asked my rural patients the same question, I would receive strange looks with the response “why would I want to do that” or “once a year, on my birthday.” Having been born and raised near New York City, I was also surprised when my rural patients

would often tell me they hunted or fished for their food. I never knew before that an elk would provide meat for a family for a year.

Shortly after becoming a renal dietitian, I was invited to attend a meeting of our local CRN Chapter, Northern Arizona Council on Renal Nutrition. I went not knowing what to expect but found them to be a welcoming group of dietitians from all areas of nephrology care. My chapter has 5–6 meeting per year, almost always with an educational component. It was an easy way to meet dietitians involved in transplant, chronic kidney disease, pediatric nephrology, peritoneal as well as hemodialysis and employed by hospitals, MD practices, large, small, and independent dialysis providers. We shared best practices, discussed new medications and treatment options, reviewed journal articles, and had presentations on every aspect of renal care. My scope of understanding of renal nutrition improved as a result of attending the CRN meetings and provided me with contacts I could call upon when my own knowledge was lacking. After a few years, I was asked by CRN to run for office and have served my local chapter as Secretary, Co-Chair, Chair and once again as Secretary. I have served my chapter as an officer since 1995 and have been the Secretary for the past 10 years. Local chapter members encouraged me to run for office for National CRN in 2006. I was very nervous to do so; however, to my great surprise, I was elected Region V Alternate Representative in 2006.

As Chairperson for the CRN, I would like to continue the work of my predecessors Judy Kirk and Lisa Gutekunst and continue to focus on improved communications. As I write this article, the CRN Executive Committee is starting our preparations for the NKF Spring Clinical Meeting to be held Orlando, Florida, on April 18–22. During this meeting, we will have the opportunity to meet with representatives from the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics Renal Practice Group. Our two groups will discuss ways we can work together to help improve the lives of our renal patients as well as how to improve communications among renal professionals. One of our joint projects under discussion will be when the next revision of A Clinical Guide to Nutrition Care in Kidney Disease will occur. Our CRN membership has also requested we discuss with RPG ways we can identify renal professionals in our communities who provide chronic kidney disease education outside of the dialysis facilities.

At the NKF Spring Clinical Meeting, CRN will also have welcomed two new members to our council from Region II. Kristen Hackey from Marietta, Georgia, will be the Region II Representative. Kristen has been very active in

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Fresenius Kidney Care Sun Lakes, 9666 E. Riggs Rd #143, Sun Lakes, AZ 85248.

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*Address correspondence to* Laura Holden, MBA, RD, CSR, FNKF, US Renal Care South Phoenix, 4621 S. Central Ave., Phoenix, AZ 85040. E-mail: [dogwalkerholden@aol.com](mailto:dogwalkerholden@aol.com)

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Georgia Council on Renal Nutrition. She has served her chapter as Awards Chair, Chair-Elect, and Chair. Region II incoming Alternate Representative, Ruba Jibreen, is also from the Georgia Council on Renal Nutrition. Ruba has represented her chapter as Membership Chair and Treasurer. I am very happy to report former Region II Representative; Christine Benedetti is continuing her excellent work with the CRN Executive Council and is now our Chair-Elect.

In Region IV, Meredith Larsen and Letty Moreno-Brown continue with the executive council; however,

they have switched position. Meredith is now the Region Representative and Letty the Alternate Representative. We are very grateful to them for their service and dedication to their region and look forward to their input at our upcoming meeting.

I would appreciate any and all comments, concerns, and feedback from our membership. Please feel free to contact me at any time. I look forward to an exciting year working with our talented membership on improving communication and promoting the value of CRN in our professional careers.