

Member Spotlight

Sonja L. Connor, MS, RDN, LD



Sonja Connor currently serves as the 2013-2014 President-Elect of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics. She is a Research Associate Professor at Oregon Health & Science University where she teaches nutrition courses to medical and physician assistant students, participates in the graduate nutrition program, and heads efforts to stimulate outcomes research. Sonja has had a rewarding career as a researcher, participating in trailblazing research on healthy eating to prevent coronary and other chronic diseases, and also contributing to groundbreaking work on omega-3 fatty acids and the developing brain and retina that set the stage for the addition of DHA to infant formula. Her research also focused on lutein and macular degeneration, as well as the retinopathy of prematurity. Sonja appreciated being part of a research team due to the broad range of ideas and opinions that were a result of rich discussion. Through her research career, Sonja enjoyed participating in the science and translating results to the practical aspects of shopping, cooking and eating. She is also well-known for authoring cookbooks, [The New American Diet](#), [The New American Diet System](#) and [The New American Diet Cookbook](#).

Sonja was born in Van Nuys, California, and moved to Scott City, Kansas, at the age of three with her mother and younger sister shortly after her father died. Growing up in Western Kansas, Sonja lived near family and her mother ran a local diner. At an early age, Sonja decided that, “no matter what I did in life, I was determined that it would have nothing to do with food!” It was during her junior year of college that she decided to pursue Dietetics and Institutional Management (primarily because she had to declare a major!), a decision she has never regretted. Sonja earned a bachelor’s degree from Kansas State University, as well as a master’s degree from the University of Iowa where she also completed her dietetic internship.

Sonja joined the Public Health/Community Nutrition Practice Group (PHCNPG) to learn more about the diversity and breadth of expertise of members. While she is greatly involved with the Academy’s Research DPG (she previously served as Chair), she has maintained an interest in public health since conducting the Family Heart Study from 1978-1984, a coronary heart prevention study that focused on families making healthy lifestyle changes. Sonja has been greatly involved with Academy, serving as Chair-Elect of the Academy’s Board of Directors, as Chair of the Foundation’s Scholarship Committee, as Speaker of the House of Delegates, and currently as the 2013-2014 President-Elect.

Sonja has also been involved with her state’s affiliate as President of the [Oregon Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics](#) and as a member of the [Oregon Board of Licensed Dietitians](#). She has taken on leadership roles in her community, as well, serving as a board member and Chair for [Willamette View, Inc.](#), a continuing care retirement community, as a lay leader for the First United Methodist Church, and as Chair of the board for [Portland Homeless Family Solutions](#).

Throughout her career, Sonja has been honored with several awards and recognitions. Through the Academy, Sonja was honored with the Medallion Award in 2010 and the Excellence in Research Award in 1996. She also received the Physician Assistant Program Teaching Award through Oregon Health & Science University in 2002, the Health Promotion Award through the Oregon Association for the Advancement of Health Education in 1991, and was honored as an Alumnae Fellow of the College of Human Ecology at Kansas State University in 1996.

In her free time, Sonja enjoys being active, doing yoga and walking five miles twice a week with friends. Most of all, Sonja loves spending time with her grandchildren and great grandchildren. One day a week, she helps home school two of her grandchildren. Sonja also loves cooking for family and friends. She has a large garden which one year, yielded enough tomatoes for 23 quarts of marinara sauce! Among her favorite foods are foods of the Northwest, including salmon, strawberries, blueberries, raspberries, blackberries, apples, and pears.

PHCNPG is proud of Sonja's work and appreciates her contributions to the Academy and research!