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## **ICYMI: Neurosurgery Leader Responds to Federal Action Aligning Hospital Nutrition with Patient Care**

Washington, DC – The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) recently [issued guidance](#) directing hospitals to strengthen nutrition services by aligning patient meals with the 2025–2030 Dietary Guidelines for Americans and reducing reliance on ultra-processed foods, added sugars, and refined carbohydrates.

Alexander A. Khalessi, MD, MBA, FAANS, Chair of the Washington Committee for the American Association of Neurological Surgeons (AANS) and Congress of Neurological Surgeons (CNS), issued the following statement:

“Nutrition is foundational to health. From the management of inflammation and chronic disease to the composition of the gut microbiome, what we eat directly impacts every aspect of wellness and medical care. HHS Secretary Kennedy and CMS Administrator Oz should be congratulated for drawing a clear and rational connection between hospital nutrition and patient recovery. Aligning federal dietary guidance with the food available to patients in hospitals is exactly the kind of policy alignment needed to improve the health of Americans.”

“In my own practice at UC San Diego, we have long recognized this connection. Our health system has taken a curated approach to hospital nutrition, prioritizing whole, organic foods, expanding healthy options, and reducing reliance on processed products in both cafeterias and patient meals.”

“I am proud of our leaders in nutrition science, gastroenterology, and health system administration who recognized this trend early. It is encouraging to see that approach now reflected in national policy. Our patients in San Diego – and, I hope, soon patients across the country – will be better for it.”

Through a Quality & Safety Special Alert memorandum, CMS reinforced existing Medicare Conditions of Participation requiring hospitals to ensure patient diets meet individual nutritional needs, maintain dietitian oversight, and integrate nutrition into quality and performance improvement programs. The guidance also encourages hospitals to update menus, procurement practices, and therapeutic diet protocols to reflect current evidence on diet quality and health outcomes.

The policy reflects growing recognition that diet quality is a key driver of chronic disease, which accounts for approximately 90 percent of U.S. health care spending, and underscores the role of

nutrition in improving recovery and long-term outcomes for patients. In practice, this may include prioritizing whole, minimally processed foods in patient meals. For example, a recommendation may include offering steel-cut oats with fruit and nuts instead of refined cereals with added sugars, or grilled fish with whole grains and vegetables in place of heavily processed or fried options. Beverage offerings may emphasize water, milk, or unsweetened tea, rather than routine availability of sugar-sweetened beverages.

The AANS/CNS Washington Committee remains actively involved in shaping federal nutrition policy. In January, Dr. Khalessi issued a statement on the release of the 2025–2030 Dietary Guidelines for Americans, which can be found [here](#).

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*The **American Association of Neurological Surgeons** (AANS), founded in 1931, and the **Congress of Neurological Surgeons** (CNS), founded in 1951, are the two largest scientific and educational associations for neurosurgical professionals worldwide. These groups represent over 10,000 neurosurgeons worldwide. Neurological surgery is the medical specialty concerned with the prevention, diagnosis, treatment, and rehabilitation of disorders that affect the entire nervous system, including the spinal column, spinal cord, brain, and peripheral nerves. For more information, please visit [www.aans.org](http://www.aans.org) and [www.cns.org](http://www.cns.org).*