

“Nutrition in Medicine”: Needs Analysis, Improvement, and Delivery of Nutritional Education in Medical Education and Practice

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Abstract

Background: Chronic diseases such as diabetes, heart disease, and obesity impose substantial public health and economic burdens, yet many are preventable or manageable through proper dietary interventions. Despite this, education on nutrition remains alarmingly deficient across all levels of American education, including medical training, leaving many future physicians ill-prepared to provide evidence-based dietary advice to their patients. This educational gap perpetuates reliance on unreliable sources for nutritional guidance, limiting the potential for effective patient care and preventive healthcare.

Objectives: This study aimed to assess the amount and quality of nutrition education received by medical students and physicians during their undergraduate and graduate medical training.

Methods: A survey was administered to a diverse group of medical students and physicians, capturing data on the hours of nutrition education received, the quality and content of that instruction, and the participants' ability to address patient questions regarding nutrition and dietary supplements. The survey also explored respondents' opinions on the need for enhanced nutritional training in medical education.

Results: All respondents reported insufficient nutrition education during their medical training, with most estimating only a few hours of formal instruction. Participants frequently expressed feeling unprepared to address patient questions on diet and

nutrition. A significant majority indicated a desire for more comprehensive nutrition education.

Significance: The findings underscore the urgent need for integrating robust nutrition education into medical school curricula and continuing medical education programs. Addressing this gap could equip physicians with the tools to provide effective dietary counseling, reduce the prevalence of diet-related chronic diseases, and lower healthcare costs. Beyond medical training, extending nutritional education to K-12 students and public health initiatives has the potential to foster a culture of healthier dietary habits, benefiting society at large.