The Knowledge and Attitudes of Pediatricians Toward Whole Food Plant-Based Diets

Kseniya Anishchenko, BA1, Celia Lenarz-Geisen, MD1, Adane Wogu, PhD1, Tracy Cushing, MD1,2
1University of Colorado School of Medicine, 13001 E 17th Pl, Aurora, CO 80045
2University of Colorado, Division of Emergency Medicine, 13001 E 17th Pl, Aurora, CO 80045

Introduction

• There has been abundant evidence showing the health benefits of a plant-based diet, such as reduced risks of obesity, cardiovascular disease, diabetes and malignancies.1-2
• Many physicians do not stress the importance of these diets as an important aspect of chronic disease prevention and treatment.
• Pediatricians have an important role in dietary education of children, but there is scarce data focused specifically on pediatricians’ knowledge regarding plant-based nutrition.3
• Our study assessed pediatrician’s general nutritional knowledge and attitudes regarding whole food plant-based diets.

Methods

A cross-sectional study was done using a previously implemented questionnaire that was distributed among a sample of pediatricians.

Survey was administered from January 2021 to October 2021. 117 participants responded to the survey.

Survey items were scored based on nutrition knowledge and attitudes toward plant-based diets, and then analyzed for mean scores.

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of survey participants (n=117)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Value</th>
<th>Age, median, range</th>
<th>Age, median, range</th>
<th>Age, median, range</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>42 years</td>
<td>(24-75)</td>
<td>42 years</td>
<td>(24-75)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>90 (77.0%)</td>
<td>Caucasian race</td>
<td>90 (77.0%)</td>
<td>Caucasian race</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>90 (77.0%)</td>
<td>Female, %</td>
<td>90 (77.0%)</td>
<td>Female, %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>73 (62.4%)</td>
<td>Have Children, %</td>
<td>73 (62.4%)</td>
<td>Have Children, %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>44 (37.6%)</td>
<td>Pediatric Residents, %</td>
<td>44 (37.6%)</td>
<td>Pediatric Residents, %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65 (55.5%)</td>
<td>Following Plant-Based Diet*, %</td>
<td>65 (55.5%)</td>
<td>Following Plant-Based Diet*, %</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Plant-based diet means following a vegetarian, vegan or whole-food plant-based diet

Figure 1: Nutrition Education Received by Pediatricians in Medical School and Residency

Results

Figure 2: Mean Knowledge and Attitude Scores Toward Plant-Based Diets

Out of 10 knowledge questions, mean correct score for our participants was 61.36%. Out of 9 attitude questions, mean correct score for our participants was 47.36%.

Conclusions

• Pediatricians are exposed to very little nutrition education hours during medical school and in their continued education training.
• A significant portion of pediatricians in our survey had low average knowledge base in vegetarian nutrition and did not hold positive attitudes concerning plant-based diets.
• Increasing education hours for pediatricians regarding plant-based diets may help them better counsel their patients on their dietary decisions.

Selected References

