

7

## NUTRITION RELATED KNOWLEDGE, ATTITUDES, AND PRACTICE AMONG PHYSIOTHERAPIST IN IRELAND: A SURVEY

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10.1136/bmjnp-2022-summit2022.10

**Background** Dietary factors are responsible for a considerable share of the global disease burden; therefore, nutrition should be viewed as an important component in the treatment and prevention of chronic illness by all healthcare professionals. Physiotherapists are ideally positioned to provide nutrition-related advice to individuals at risk of developing chronic disease.

**Objectives** To determine physiotherapists' self-perceived nutrition competence using the validated NUTCOMP tool and to investigate the relationship between previous nutrition education and the self-perceived nutrition competence of physiotherapists in Ireland.

**Methods** The NUTCOMP tool was used to evaluate the self-perceived nutrition competence of members of the Irish Society of Chartered Physiotherapists (n=447). Participants' scores across four constructs of nutrition care were combined to provide a self-perceived nutrition competence score. Pearson's Chi Square tests were used to determine whether associations existed between demographic variables and participants' competence scores.

**Results** The majority of participants were female (81.4%, n=364) and 80.9% (n=362) of those who responded were aged between 25–54 years. On average, participants were practicing as physiotherapists for 17.37±11.22 years, with a range of 0–50 years. 55.1% (n=246) of participants had completed a degree, certificate or other non-degree course that did not include nutrition content while 6% (n=27) had completed an education program that was predominantly focused on nutrition. Physiotherapists were very confident in their ability to provide nutrition care and attitudes towards nutrition were positive. However, their self-perceived competence with respect to nutrition-related knowledge and skills was relatively low. Most participants (70.5%) agreed they required further nutrition education to support them in their future role. Previous nutrition education did not significantly influence participants confidence across the constructs whereas age and years of practice significantly influenced self-perceived competence to provide nutrition care (P<0.05).

**Conclusion** While Irish physiotherapists have positive attitudes towards nutrition care, they lack confidence in their nutrition-related knowledge and skills, meaning vital opportunities to treat or prevent chronic disease are potentially being missed. This study highlighted a need for further nutrition training among physiotherapists in Ireland. The introduction of competency-based nutrition education should be considered in physiotherapy entry-level curricula and continuing professional development courses.

8

## THE IMPACT OF A HANDS-ON NUTRITION COURSE FOCUS IN CARDIOVASCULAR DISEASE AND TYPE 2 DIABETES FOR MEDICAL STUDENTS IN PORTUGAL: AN OBSERVATIONAL PILOT STUDY

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10.1136/bmjnp-2022-summit2022.11

**Background** Physicians have a critical role in promoting healthy behaviors, a cost-effective intervention that results in reduction of disease morbidity and mortality. It is essential that medical students have a nutritional education that allows them to correctly inform their patients. At NOVA Medical School (NMS), NOVA University of Lisbon, nutrition and metabolism is a required curricular unit in the 1st year of the medical curriculum. In 2021, for the final-year medical students we developed a hands-on nutrition course (8 hours of contact time) based on the Mediterranean Diet (MD) principles and its association with cardiovascular and metabolic protection.

**Objectives** To determine the impact of a nutrition practical course on nutritional knowledge, self-reported cooking skills, confidence on future dietary counselling, and adherence to the MD of the 6th year medical students at NMS.

**Methods** This was an observational study approved by the Ethics Committee of NMS (38/2021/CEFCM). All the registered students (n=48) were invited to complete a self-administered online questionnaire at the beginning and at the end of the course.

**Results** At the beginning and at the end of the course students reported good nutrition knowledge, having 83% of the answers correct (15 questions). After the course there was an increase in self-report skills to cook legumes (p<0.05). The students' confidence on their knowledge about the role of food constituents in health (p<0.05) and food/nutrient interactions (p<0.05) also increased. The students' confidence to advice counselling strategies for preparing meals with a lower glycemic index (p<0.05) and for incrementing polyunsaturated fatty acids rich foods (p<0.05) also increased. In both times the students had moderate MD adherence (9.0 vs. 7.5 p=0.157). A limitation of the present study is the fact that only 33% of registered students attended to more than half of the course (n=16). Only 37.5% of those answered to both questionnaires (n=6). This low adherence may be due to schedule constraints related with clinical internship.

**Conclusion** Our pilot study evidences that hands-on nutrition education has a significant positive impact in confidence to perform dietary counselling. In addition, it would be important to assess if the self-reported cooking skills and the confidence to perform dietary counselling are maintained over time.