



Food for Thought: Northern Ontario clinicians' perspectives on nutrition-related knowledge and skills needed by physicians across practice settings

PRESENTING AUTHOR:

Lee Rysdale (1)

AUTHOR(S):

Rysdale, L (1), Wakegijig, J (1), Alderton, N (2), Bachiu, J (1), Bessett, N (1), Campbell, A (1), Clark, S (2), Green, C (2), Leduc, L (1), Moise, A (1), Payne, G (2).

AFFILIATIONS:

(1) Northern Ontario School of Medicine, Sudbury, ON, (2) Northern Ontario School of Medicine, Thunder Bay, ON.

ABSTRACT:

Food and nutrition are key to preventing and treating many chronic and acute conditions, yet dietary strategies are not emphasized in physician training. Canadian medical graduates, including NOSM's, are dissatisfied with their nutrition curriculum. The Undergraduate Medical Education (UME) Nutrition Curriculum Working Group (NCWG) was established to identify gaps, required content, and best practice models related to nutrition in disease and wellness, personal wellness, and prevention and treatment of acute and chronic disease. With an emphasis on curriculum review, integration and renewal, and unique curriculum concerns in Northern Ontario, an education needs assessment was undertaken to inform the NCWG's activities.

Methods: A 10-item online survey (Qualtrics©) was administered (March 2020) to a convenience sample of Northern Ontario medical doctors (MDs) and registered dietitians (RDs) through NOSM channels including Communications, Faculty Affairs and the Northern Ontario Dietetic Internship Program. Using the Deakin University nutrition competency framework and a NOSM social accountability lens, data was coded and analyzed descriptively and thematically.

Results: Of the 123 responses (90% RDs); 38% practiced rurally, 46% urban, and 16% both. Most physicians worked in Family Medicine, while RDs practiced in various settings and specialties. There was general consensus among RDs and MDs including a need for increased curriculum content related to basic nutritional science and current nutrition strategies/counselling skills to manage obesity and diabetes. Communicating evidence-based nutrition information, knowledge of the RD role, and how to make RD referrals was highlighted. Knowledge of social determinants such as culture (e.g. Indigenous), food insecurity and poverty were noted. Hands-on learning would support learners to manage personal wellness plus practical knowledge and tools to share with patients. Practicing physicians preferred self-directed/online learning and face to face workshops.

Conclusions: Valuable insights will inform enhancements to the UME curriculum, as well as to learner wellness programming, and physician professional development opportunities.