

Encountering the Deficit – A Proposed Module in Nutrition for Students and Health Care Professionals

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Background

Nutrition is the most modifiable factor for our survival among the other two factors, genetics and the environment. Sound nutrition and dietary patterns allow for proper growth, protection from nutrition-related diseases and preservation of health. Healthy individuals would be capable of performing all tasks they wish; thus, can be productive and benefit their societies. Additionally, healthy individuals spare the costs of different expenses spent on medical care.

The main concern of health care professionals is the general health of the populations they cater for. These professionals include many specialties that complement each other to provide the best standards of services possible. Practitioners include (among many): physicians, physician assistants, nurses, nurse practitioners, pharmacists, dentists, dental hygienists, occupational therapists, physical therapists, speech and language pathologists, can be effective in enhancing the awareness of their patients about the significance of nutrition for health.

The bulk of literature indicates that nutrition education in the academic preparation of physicians is inadequate. Calls for inclusion of nutrition in the medical curriculum have been made more than 40 years ago in the United States. Studies in different parts of the world showed that teaching of nutrition in the medical curriculum is deficient. Also, it seems that other academic curricula for health care professionals lack sufficient nutrition education. There are studies that reported improvement in nutritional knowledge after administering a course in nutrition. Thus; the more knowledgeable these professionals are about nutrition, the more effective they become in providing sound nutritional services and advice.

A module in nutrition is proposed herein for all those who are involved in patient care and services, whether they are currently practitioners or while being prepared for such roles in the future. Such a module would also benefit young college and university students – as well as those who are in their proximate circles.

The Module:

Following are the components of the proposed module.

Part 1: objectives of this part are: defining aspects of healthy nutrition, defining what is meant by general health, and emphasizing the relationship between healthy nutrition and general health. Components of this part are:

Section I

- 1- What are the six classes of nutrients?
- 2- What are the main food groups?
- 3- What is Food Guide Pyramid?
- 4- What is the purpose of all food guides and of dietary recommendations?

Section II

- 1- What is the official World Health Organization (UN) definition of general health?
- 2- How can body organs and systems function normally?
- 3- What are the roles of different nutrients for normal bodily functions?

Section III

- 1- What are the energy contents of foods?
- 2- What are the different uses of food energy in the body?
- 3- How can energy requirements for individuals be calculated?

Section IV

- 1- What are the different stages of human life?
- 2- What are nutrient requirements for the different stages of human life?
- 3- What are the special nutritional considerations for pregnant women, lactating mothers, the elderly and handicapped people?

Section V

- 1- What are the nutrients deficiencies?
- 2- What are the consequences of nutrient deficiencies?
- 3- What are the conditions and the diseases that result from nutrient deficiencies?

Part 2: objectives of this part are: communicable and non-communicable diseases, nutrition-related diseases, and emphasizing the role of nutrition in combating disease.

Section I

- 1- How can the body function normally?
- 2- What are the physiological disturbances that cause diseases?

Section II

- 1- What is meant by cardiovascular diseases?
- 2- What are the factors that are risk factors for cardiovascular diseases?
- 3- What is the significance of having body weight, blood pressure, cholesterol, blood lipids within normal values?
- 4- How can healthy nutrition aid in reducing the risk factors of cardiovascular diseases?

Section III

- 1- What is obesity?
- 2- What is diabetes mellitus?
- 3- What is kidney disease?
- 4- What is anemia?
- 5- What is osteoporosis?

Section IV

- 1- What are the nutritional considerations for overweight and obese patients?
- 2- What are the nutritional considerations for cardiovascular disease patients?
- 3- What are the nutritional considerations for diabetic patients?
- 4- What are the nutritional considerations for anemic patients?
- 5- What are the nutritional considerations for osteoporotic patients?

Section V

- 1- What are the nutritional considerations for nutrition-related psychological problems?
- 2- Significance of enhancing nutrition knowledge among patients and their immediate family members.
- 3- Benefits of nutritional awareness and knowledge to the general public.

Implementation of the Module

It is appropriate that the contents of the module to be implemented be written as a handbook that would be given to all those who are enrolled. Such a handbook would include important information about the following:

- 1- An introduction that explains the purpose of the module and its objectives.
- 2- For each lecture/session/topic, there needs to be a write-up on the objective(s) of the subject(s) being taught and a summary of its/their content(s).
- 3- Except if the module instructor would prepare handouts for the subjects being covered, he/she should provide references for studying materials and/or for additional reading.

It is suggested that the duration of the module to be between 8 to 10 weeks if it is taught as a part of the curriculum. If such a module is administered to other groups (i.e., practitioners), it would be given over a two-week period as an intensive course. It should be noted that the level of coverage of such components, as well as its content, ought to be flexible and according to the background of those who will be taking it - in order to derive the best outcome possible. It is suggested that the teaching of the module be carried out by a qualified nutritionist, a clinical nutritionist, and/or a registered dietician. If the module will be taught as a component of a specific curriculum, student grades would give an indication of the knowledge gained. However, it is recommended that there would be a brief assessment of nutrition knowledge prior to the teaching of the module and also after the completion of the module. This would allow for the evaluation of the outcome of administering such a module.

Concluding Remarks

When teaching this module for a given group, the scientific background of participants needs to be known. This will enable

the module instructor to know what contents of the module are of more significance for the attendees and which of the subjects being covered need to be stressed or further emphasized. It is hoped that the proposed module would be useful to implement and that the outcome of such would prove to be beneficial to all those who will attend it. Enhancing the level of knowledge among members of the practicing health care professionals, including physicians, would certainly be of benefit to themselves, their immediate circles, their patients, and to members of the society-at-large.

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