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Clinical and surgical physician's perception of nutrition knowledge



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Abstract

Background Due to the significant increase in the prevalence of food-related diseases, the value that physicians place on nutritional advice may have implications for patient treatment. The objective of this study was to evaluate the perception of the importance of nutritional intervention among physicians in the Universidad San Francisco de Quito's (USFQ) healthcare system.

Methods: This cross-sectional study employed a telephone survey administered to a subset of all medical doctors (MDs) working in the healthcare system clinics of USPQ between 2021 and 2022. Study participants were recruited through voluntary response sample from a complete list of 253 MD. The single time questionnaire consisted of a 22-item validated survey in which attitudes, self-perceived capacity, and knowledge about nutrition ofmedical doctors were evaluated. Data was analyzed using descriptive statistics, two-sided t test, bivariate associations and linear and logistic regressions.

Results: 136 MDs completed the survey yielding a response rate of 54%. Our analysis grouped participants into clinical (CE) and non-clinical specialties, hereafter referred to as surgical MDs. While a higher percentage of physicians in CE are confident in their ability to provide examples of recommended food portions based on national or international guidelines, 1 in 10 do not know how to use and interpret BMI or waist circumference, and around 1 in 3 do not know how many calories there are in one gram of fat, protein, or carbohydrates, and their basic metabolic functions. Almost all survey participants believe MDs can have an impact on the eating behavior of a patient if time is used to discuss the problem, however, almost half of survey participants believe nutrition counseling is not an effective use of time.

Conclusion: It is important to explore the perceptions and self-confidence of physicians around nutrition related issues. Our results demonstrated that nearly 1 in 4 surgical MDs do not feel capable of recognizing nutritional risk in patients, which highlights the essentiality of physicians having an updated understanding of basic nutrition principles. Future research should examine how commonly MDs refer patients to nutritionists/dietitians, as well as strategies for improving physician knowledge on basic nutrition concepts.

Keywords Nutrition care, Physicians, Attitudes, Bellefs

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