Nutrition education in US medical schools¹, ²

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The initiative of medical students and recent graduates of US medical schools to recognize and promote the inclusion of essential concepts of nutrition in medical education is a major contribution to and advancement of the greater awareness of nutrition in health and disease.

The recognition of nutrition in the medical care of patients becomes clearly evident even in early medical education. Students quickly become aware of the escalating national cost of medical school itself as well as that of health care education. As students begin to see patients, they become increasingly aware of the importance of nutritional evaluation in the optimal delivery of better care. This awareness may extend to facets of nutrition support: cost of foods, availability of essential nutrients, provision of supplemental essential nutrients, and the need to educate patients in meeting nutrient needs. Medical students also become increasingly aware that the transfer of nutrition concepts to patient care is often difficult. At the same time, medical students come to recognize and appreciate the critical need for essential nutrients in the care of patients and the promotion of wellness.

Appropriate training of medical students in the nutritional care of patients has become more clearly recognized; however, there is still room for further advancements (1–3). Gradually, more medical school curricula reflect a solid basis for varied clinical experiences that include nutritional support for patients.

Basic nutrition sciences in current medical schools should include the following topics: nutrition during life cycle changes, nutritional assessment of patients, physiology of starvation, metabolic and nutritional consequences of physiologic stress and trauma, and appropriate dieting and maintenance of health.

The clinical basis of nutrition in medical schools should include: inpatient and outpatient consultation, care of patients, and competency in evaluation and management of the nutritional condition and disorders of patients.

The report “Essentials of nutrition education in medical schools: a national consensus” (4) recognizes the significant impact of medical schools and their faculty that currently provide and encourage nutrition education for medical students. It also recognizes the increasing awareness of practicing physicians of the importance of providing nutritional evaluation and support of patients as well as appropriate nutrition for maintaining wellness. Finally, this report also calls for even greater physician awareness of the need for and application of nutritional evaluation and support for all patients as an essential aspect of patient care.

The American Medical Student Association’s Nutrition Curriculum Committee makes a unique contribution to our awareness of and our enthusiastic support of the concepts proposed. ³

REFERENCES


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