

What do non-dietitian health professionals think about giving nutrition advice?

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Given the prevalence of nutrition-related chronic disease in Australia and the relatively small number of dietitians especially outside metropolitan areas, it is important that all health professionals can support clients' healthy eating practices by providing appropriate general nutrition advice. However, little is known regarding the nutrition advice practices and perspectives of non-dietitian health professionals. This study employed a survey methodology to capture nutrition advice practices and perspectives of non-dietitian health professionals, their level of nutrition knowledge, and understanding of their nutrition advice scope of practice. A total of 260 Australian non-dietitian health professionals from 26 different professions completed the survey. Participants were recruited via professional associations, social media platforms (Facebook, LinkedIn) and snowball sampling. The majority of participants (89.2%) believed giving nutrition advice was an important part of their role. The highest rated topic for provision of nutrition advice was 'healthy eating' (73.1%). On average, self-rated confidence to give nutrition advice was moderate to low and most participants rated their own level of nutrition knowledge on a 10-point scale as less than 5. More than half of the participants reported that nutrition was included in their professional degrees (60.0%) however for most (33.5%) it was only part of another subject. Measured level of nutrition knowledge using AUS-R NKQ ($Md = 86.00/117$, IQR: 77–95) was comparable to university educated people. Thompson et al. 2021⁽¹⁾ using the AUS-R NKQ survey found engineering students' median score was 82.00/117 (IQR: 76–87.25) and nutrition students' 102.00/117 (IQR: 95–107), placing our result in between these. However, there was great variation between professions, for example social workers scored substantially lower ($Md = 78.00/117$, IQR: 68.5–88) and osteopaths substantially higher ($Md = 93.5/117$, IQR: 88.25–97.75, $p < .003$). While respondents typically reported giving nutrition advice at least a couple of times a month, some provide nutrition advice every time they work with clients. When giving nutrition advice participants reported not regularly using information from the Australian Dietary Guidelines and clients were not regularly referred to see a dietitian. While participants' understanding of their scope of practice regarding giving general nutrition advice was good, some participants believed it appropriate to give specific nutrition advice aimed at helping clients with diet-related conditions. Provision of healthy eating advice was believed to be an important part of participants' role and regular provision of nutrition advice was reported. However, the non-dietitian health professionals who participated in this study lacked training and confidence to provide healthy eating advice, and some required greater clarity regarding their nutrition scope of practice. Improved training and support for non-dietitian health professionals regarding the provision of general nutrition advice is needed.

Reference

1. Thompson C, Vidgen HA, Gallegos D, et al. (2021) *Public Health Nutr* **24** (7), 1608–1618.