

An integrative review evaluating the competence, knowledge or skills of allied health professionals in providing nutrition care to patients with chronic disease

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Nutrition can have a significant impact on the development of chronic diseases. Allied healthcare professionals are in a valuable position to provide patients with nutrition care as they are often a first point of contact. Understanding the level of competence in providing nutrition care is necessary to help facilitate primary care approaches and support best practice in healthcare⁽¹⁾. This study aims to summarise the existing qualitative and quantitative literature available on the self-perceived nutrition knowledge of allied health professions, their attitudes, skills & practice towards providing nutrition care to patients and to identify any gaps/barriers to providing nutrition care. PROSPERO registration number: CRD42020217963.

Electronic databases CINAHL, Medline, PubMed, Scopus, Web of Science were searched for relevant studies. Inclusion criteria contained studies from any location, language & study setting, between 2000 and 2021. Searches were then imported into EndNote reference manager and duplicates were deleted. Articles were then exported into Covidence evidence synthesis software, was used for title and abstract screening. A modified version of the Critical Appraisal Skills Programme quality framework, (CASP) will be used to assess methodological quality. A narrative synthesis of both quantitative and qualitative evidence was conducted.

Using a pre-determined search strategy 2,042 articles were identified. Ten articles were included in the review. Five main themes were identified in the data, these include 1) The role of allied health professionals in providing nutrition care to patients; 2) Inadequate knowledge & level of nutrition education across allied health professions; 3) The attitudes, beliefs & confidence in providing nutrition care to patients; 4) The skills & practice of allied health professionals in providing nutrition care to patients; and 5) Barriers experienced by allied health professionals & strategies to overcome these barriers in providing nutrition care to patients.

The majority of allied health professionals believe it is within their scope of practice to provide nutrition care to patients with chronic disease. Overall, steps should be taken to improve nutrition knowledge and education across professions and to incorporate continuous training to provide up to date relevant nutrition guidelines on the management of chronic diseases. The proposal of expanding the role of allied health professionals and the suggestion of a clear process on 'how' and 'when' to refer to experts is deemed essential. Future research should focus on the implementation of these change solutions and determine how best to overcome the identified barriers in order to maximise the level of nutrition care provided by allied health professions and received by patients, striving to reduce the risk of chronic disease leading to better overall health and well-being. This review supports the need for improvements in education & training to enhance provision of nutrition care.

Reference

1. Ball, L. E. & Leveritt, M. D (2015) *Fam Pract* **32**, 706–10