



Nutrition education in the medical workforce – comment from the Cancer and Nutrition NIHR infrastructure collaboration

10th May 2018

[Recent news coverage](#) has seen the issue of nutritional education for doctors highlighted as a problem that needs to be addressed. A new organisation created by medical students called Nutritank is providing an information and innovation hub to students and promoting the need for greater education within medical training around nutrition and lifestyle.

The BMJ also published [a blog written by medical students](#) in September 2017 calling for better education on nutrition to allow doctors to focus on how they counsel patients on nutrition and lifestyle, personalised to comorbidities, individual cultures, and characters, which could assist in preventing non-communicable diseases, including the 11 cancers associated with overweight and obesity ([WCRF](#)). Dietitians are the key contact for patients to receive dietary interventions but dietetic resource is insufficient, and patients may only receive a referral to dietetics if there is a clear nutritional diagnosis. If all doctors are properly trained about nutrition, they will be able to provide or signpost the patient to appropriate nutritional care and screen patients appropriately for nutritional problems.

This call for better education in nutrition is important in oncology because there is a clear need to develop capability within the workforce to improve nutritional care for those living with and beyond cancer. If there is a desire from within the workforce itself for this change, it facilitates implementing any changes.

In 1997, following an invitation from the Royal College of Pathologists, the Presidents of almost all medical Royal Colleges came to a meeting to discuss the need for nutrition education for doctors. Under the guidance of Professor Alan Jackson, these colleges agreed a series of learning objectives that represented the nutritional knowledge that they considered that **all** doctors (not specialists) should possess. Without this knowledge, because there is a nutritional component to most public health or clinical issues, it would not be possible to warrant the safety and competence of doctors to practice, especially in relation to nutritional aspects of diagnosis and management.

The Intercollegiate Group on Human Nutrition, with representation from all the Royal Colleges was formed with support from the Department of Health and developed a foundation course in human nutrition for doctors. Originally housed by the Royal College of Pathologists, and later (as the Academy Nutrition Group) by the Academy of Medical Royal Colleges, the Group oversaw the delivery of the Intercollegiate Course on Human Nutrition in Southampton, the Midlands and Scotland to over 1000 junior doctors and consultants .

The course remains the only structured training for doctors in the principles of nutrition, based on a systems approach just as they would have received for other anatomically defined systems at medical school as undergraduates.

At the same time, in order to help medical schools appreciate the expected needs in nutrition for newly qualified doctors, representatives of all UK Medical Schools were invited to join a group to develop a core curriculum in nutrition. This was completed in 2016, and has been commended by the Heads of Medical Schools and the GMC. The GMC guidance to medical schools and doctors in training “Tomorrow’s Doctors” signposts to this curriculum as the statement of what nutrition knowledge is expected. The curriculum can be found at

<http://www.aomrc.org.uk/publications/reports-guidance/uk-undergraduate-curriculum-nutrition/>, together with guidance notes on how to implement it within a curriculum.