

Topic Area: Nutrition and Health Education

Abstract Title

An evaluation of a nutrition training program for mental health workers in Atikokan and the District of Thunder Bay, Ontario.

Johnson L¹, Orsini S¹, Ng V²

¹Northern Ontario School of Medicine, Thunder Bay, ON, ²Thunder Bay District Health Unit, Thunder Bay, ON

Abstract

Introduction: There is growing evidence that nutrition plays important roles in the prevention, development, and management of diagnosed mental health conditions. Mental health promotion is a mandated public health service in Ontario. In response to community requests, a nutrition training program for mental health workers (MHWs) was developed in fall 2018 and piloted January 2019.

Objectives: To determine if the training program increased MHWs' nutrition knowledge related to mental health and increased their nutrition education confidence when working with clients.

Methods: Ninety-minute training sessions (n=4) were conducted with a total of 40 MHWs. An online pre- and post-training survey (SurveyMonkey®) which included Likert scales were used to assess MHWs' knowledge on nutrition and confidence discussing nutrition topics. Open-ended questions explored topics such as participants' intent and success with integrating knowledge into practice. Quantitative analysis was completed using Microsoft Excel®, and open-ended question responses were thematically analyzed; no significance testing was done.

Results: Twenty-five participants completed both the pre- and post- training surveys. There was improved knowledge related to mental health conditions and nutrition (44% to 100% pre-and post-training respectively) with increased confidence (56-96% pre-and post-training respectively) related to discussing nutrition with clients and referring to registered dietitians (RDs) (44% to 88% pre-and post-training respectively). All respondents felt the training would be useful in their work and wanted more in-depth information as well as information specific to vulnerable populations such as First Nations in remote communities.

Conclusions: Post survey results indicated training sessions increased nutrition knowledge and MHW confidence to provide nutrition education. Feedback will inform revisions. Additional implementation and evaluation in a variety of different settings is needed.

Significance to the Field of Dietetics: By providing nutrition training to MHWs, the role of RDs can be recognized in the treatment of mental health conditions and improve quality of care.