

Topic Area: Education, Training and Counselling

Abstract Title: Knowledge and attitudes of first year medical learners at the Northern Ontario School of Medicine (NOSM) on the importance of a supportive food environment and its relationship to healthy eating
Leblond E¹, Lefebvre-Breton K², Rysdale L³,
¹⁻³Northern Ontario Dietetic Internship Program, Ontario

Objectives: To better understand NOSM-Laurentian Campus first year medical learner perspectives and beliefs on healthy eating in the campus food environment and its impact on lifestyle habits.

Methods: In December 2016/January 2017, participants were recruited using posters, weekly learner newsletters and word of mouth for one of two focus groups held in early February. Online registration (Fluid Survey[®]) was used and included demographic information (age, gender, and undergraduate education) which was analyzed quantitatively. Two focus groups of 45 minutes each were conducted by a facilitator using a focus group guide with a healthy lunch as incentive. The guide included questions regarding barriers and facilitators to a supportive food environment. Responses were recorded electronically and then transcribed and analyzed using themes found in literature such as available facilities and equipment, food options, location, social motivation and support.

Results: Half (18 of 36) of the first year class at this campus attended the groups; 78% were female and all between the ages of 20-29. Most agreed the school offered limited healthy eating supports but did note access to a small lunchroom with equipment (fridge, microwave oven, etc.) as well as a Student Wellness Committee. Other barriers included a lack of healthy catering and vending options; stress; and time constraints for meal planning and preparation. The NOSM campus was also considered isolated and in a food desert.

Conclusions: To truly improve the overall health of the general population, it is critical that future medical practitioners promote and practice healthy eating habits. Providing medical students with the knowledge and tools required for practice is essential and includes a supportive campus food environment.

Significance to the field of Dietetics: Results have implications for the nutrition curriculum for learners as well as NOSM and campus food policies with recommendations to encourage a food environment conducive to healthy eating.