

# **Cultivating leadership: Preliminary results on the ways leadership skills are currently taught in dietetic education in Canada**

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**Introduction:** Within Canada, leadership is emerging as a competency domain for dietitians. Moreover, leadership within the health sector is recognized as key to improving healthcare systems. Without an understanding of the different leadership domains resident in health professions, it is challenging to develop curricula and assess leadership skills in dietetic trainees.

**Objectives:** To understand the ways current dietetic education in Canada provides leadership training and development to students and interns.

**Methods:** A document analysis of program documents from 13 dietetic programs using a standardized extraction tool was conducted. To elaborate on program activities, one purposively sampled, 90-minute focus group discussion with four dietetic educators was completed. Participants were asked questions about the ways leadership is taught in their programs. An audio recording of the interview was transcribed verbatim, and the transcript thematically coded and analyzed using NVivo 12. Themes from the document analysis and focus group were reviewed in relation to the LEADS in a Caring Environment Framework.

**Results:** Program documents suggest leadership is developed through a range of in-class activities focused on self-reflection, effective communication, engaging others, and developing plans. Educators elaborated on activity types and assessment strategies, and added that an essential component of curriculum design is the ability of the dietetic educators themselves. Educators are key in shaping the content and quality of taught content. Themes that align with LEADS were also identified.

**Conclusions:** A clear understanding of the different leadership domains in the health professions is necessary to develop and assess leadership skills in dietetic trainees.

**Significance:** This research may inform future opportunities for leadership curricula development for dietetic education and practice