

Development of an online nutrition labelling course

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Introduction: In 2016, the Food and Drug Regulations were amended to make improvements to the Nutrition Facts table and the list of ingredients. Health Canada developed an online course to teach health professionals and educators about the updated nutrition labelling information. Research has suggested that quantitative methods of evaluating courses in the form of closed end rating does not provide the full user experience; discussion groups can encourage student interactions that reveal issues not addressed in online evaluations and promote discussion of practical solutions.

Objectives: The aim of this research was to engage in extensive user experience testing to facilitate course improvements before launch and to ensure that the course met the needs of the target audience.

Methods: Health professionals (e.g., dietitians) and educators were recruited through professional associations and networks from across Canada. Discussion groups collected in-depth qualitative feedback on each module and suggestions for client activities. Descriptive statistical analysis and thematic analysis were used to interpret the data. We conducted five discussion groups (n = 21), three were in person and two were virtual.

Results: The main themes from the discussion groups were content and structure. Participants especially appreciated the course organization, variations in the interactivity, module specific quizzes, and client activity resources. They also provided input on improving the clarity of complex content, condensing lengthy modules or pages, including additional topics of interest, and adding a certificate of completion. Suggestions regarding client activity resources included adding objectives up-front, using alternative product examples, and creating a summary handout for clients.

Conclusions: Participant feedback was integrated in the final version of the online nutrition labelling course, which is planned to be launched in Spring 2021. This research illustrates the importance of user experience testing during online course development to ensure its usefulness for the target audience.

Significance: The comprehensive range of feedback for this course, including testing with a diverse audience, provides a product that has direct application to the needs of health professionals and educators, specifically dietitians.

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