

Attitudes of Canadian Dietitians about Nutraceuticals and Functional Foods


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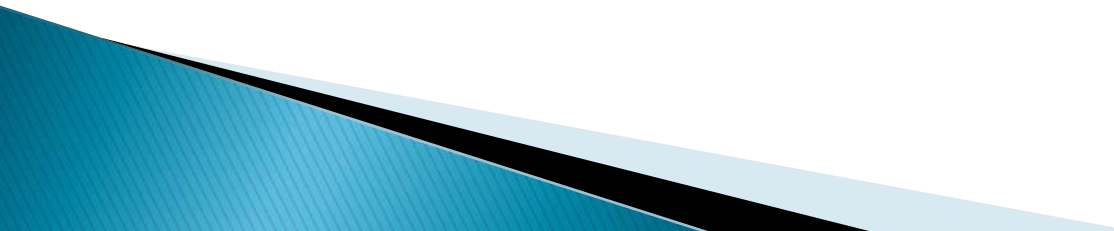
Research Questions

- ▶ How do Canadian dietitians (RDs) feel about nutraceuticals & functional foods?
 - Should these products carry **health claims**?
 - What **roles do RDs play** in recommending these products?
 - Are there **concerns** about these products?
 - Do RDs **recommend** them to clients?
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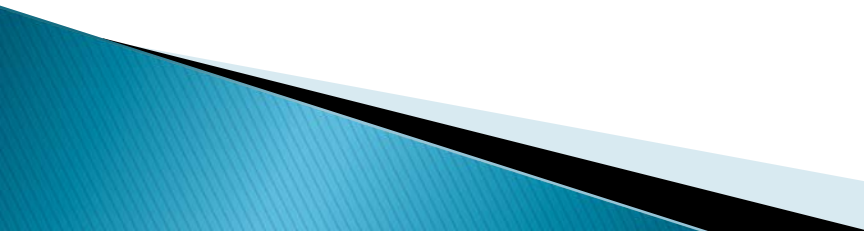
Methods

- ▶ Questionnaire was pretested & then completely redesigned
 - RDs wanted to explain their answers, concerns
- ▶ 32 open-ended questions, 11 with probes
 - “Are RDs the most appropriate professionals to be recommending nutraceuticals? Why?”


Definitions Provided

- ▶ “A **functional food** is similar in appearance to, or may be, a conventional food that is consumed as part of a usual diet, and is demonstrated to have physiological benefits and/or reduce the risk of chronic disease beyond basic nutritional functions, i.e., they **contain bioactive compounds.**”
 - ▶ (Health Canada, 2007)
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Definitions Provided

- ▶ “A **nutraceutical** is a product isolated or purified from foods that is generally sold in **medicinal forms** not usually associated with foods.
 - ▶ A nutraceutical is demonstrated to have a physiological **benefit or provide protection** against chronic disease.”
 - ▶ (Health Canada, 2007)
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Telephone Survey


- ▶ Randomly drew names of 238 RDs across Canada
 - ▶ Mailed letter re: study, with definitions, & approx. date we'd be calling
 - ▶ 2 trained research assistants tried each phone number 6+ times
 - ▶ Answers written verbatim or summarized & verified with participant
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Results

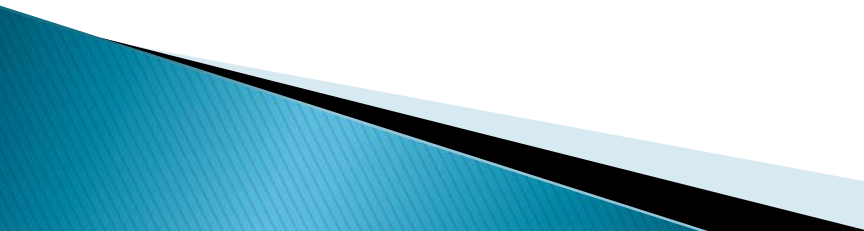
- ▶ Contacted 180 RDs; 151 (84%) completed interviews
- ▶ 60% thought that health claims should be permitted with adequate scientific evidence and govt. regulation
- ▶ 81% said that RDs were most appropriate professionals to recommend functional foods
 - Same as fortified foods




Results, cont'd

- ▶ Mixed feelings about RDs recommending nutraceuticals
 - “yes” – same as vit/min supplements
 - “no” – more appropriate for pharmacists, physicians
 - ▶ 93% said that other professionals have roles re: nutraceuticals
 - Pharmacists (98/151), alternative practitioners (34/151), nurses (20/151)
 - ▶ >50% said that nutraceuticals conflict with ‘healthy eating’ messages
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Conclusions

- ▶ RDs cautiously optimistic about potential benefits of functional foods and nutraceuticals, both for specific clinical groups and for general public
 - ▶ Wide diversity of opinions on nutraceuticals, appropriateness of health claims, use of biotechnology
 - Responses varied by area of RD practice and length of time in practice
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Relevance to Practice

- ▶ RDs want to become more knowledgeable about the research conducted to establish the efficacy of these products
 - ▶ Partnerships with govt, industry, and other health professionals, esp. pharmacists, will help ensure that consumers get consistent messages
 - ▶ Well-designed studies to establish health benefits and safety are needed
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Follow-up: Inter-professional Approaches to Practice

- ▶ CIHR funding for: **Functional Foods & Nutraceuticals: A Collaborative Forum** Linking Practitioners & Researchers
 - Held April 26 at University of Waterloo
 - Approx. 60 attendees – RDs & pharmacists from industry; practitioners, academics
 - Discussed market trends, regulation, roles in providing advice to consumers/patients
- ▶ RD/RPharm teams; mailed primer on FFN



Take-Away Message #1

Dietitians strongly believe they are the best-qualified health professionals to talk about **food, function, & diet**

- They support the promotion of foods for health benefits.
- They want to be better informed about the bioactive ingredients present/added to foods.
- Some worries re: food = nutrients, “medicalization” of food

Take-Away Message #2

RDs less confident in recommending **isolated food components** as nutraceuticals

- Worry about regulation, potential for consumer confusion or deception
- Feel that pharmacists are important partners, esp. if products are regulated as NHPs

Take-Away Message #3

- ▶ FFN is a new, evolving area and most RDs have had little formal training
 - “cautiously optimistic”
 - “show me the [unbiased] **evidence**”
- ▶ Training with pharmacists, alternative health care providers, nurses, to ensure consistent messages

Thanks!

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