

Dietetic Practice and Education

What's your change work? Mine is eating and digestive ableism and gut privilege

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Purpose: My purpose was to articulate what my change work is/has been and to invite colleagues to identify theirs to facilitate networking/collaborating to advance social change in dietetics.

Process or summary: I recently attended a webinar, *The Power of Connections Across Generations*, hosted by the Nova Scotia (NS) Network for Social Change. Three panelists of different generations spoke about their work combatting racism in NS. Each speaker used the phrase, “When I am involved in this change work...”. Their phrasing got me thinking about what my change work has been/is and how I would label it.

Systematic approach: I have kept a reflections-on-work journal for over 30 years. In reviewing some of these journals, I recognized a uniting theme of raising awareness about the challenges families experience when, owing to illness/injury/aging, a loved one can no longer eat, digest or enjoy food, and how I have incorporated this awareness in teaching, research, and nutrition counselling/education practice.

Conclusions: It was challenging to articulate my change work. I eventually arrived at the phrase ‘working to reveal eating and digestive ableism and gut privilege’. These words reflect my efforts to raise awareness about assumptions imbedded in much of nutrition education, food skilling advice, and teaching resources that everyone has a healthy and functional gut and enjoys food preparation/eating.

Recommendations: Dietitians/others involved in nutrition and food skilling education are recommended to become aware of when they use eating-related ableism and gut privilege in their work. Recognizing how eating and digesting are highly varied will lead to development of nutrition messaging that has a wider relevance for multiple audiences. Second, to facilitate networking, I encourage colleagues to find words to describe their change work.

Significance: Finding words to describe one’s change work can create conditions where dietitians embrace the value of working toward social change, where this work is supported by dietetic associations that includes creating opportunities for dietitians to rally around/network related to their change work, in addition to networking re: areas of practice or types of health conditions.