

NUTRITION KNOWLEDGE OF HEALTH SCIENCE STUDENTS

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It is being increasingly recognised that nutrition plays a significant role in the aetiology of many chronic diseases. Health science graduates in all fields will be confronted with patients needing nutritional information to prevent or alleviate their disease condition. However, a number of studies have expressed concern about the lack of nutrition knowledge of tertiary students including students in the Health Sciences and of some health professionals (McCarthy and Sabry 1973, Schwartz 1976; Dugdale et al. 1978).

A questionnaire was designed and administered to 248 first and final year students enrolled in the School of Health Sciences at the Western Australian Institute of Technology. Information was sought about nutrition knowledge of vitamins and minerals, obesity and reduction diets, heart disease, energy and nutrient needs, food quality and nutrient content and nutrient needs of children. Also assessed was the individual's level of obesity, a heart risk index, self concept of nutrition knowledge and dietary practices.

Nutrition and dietetics students were used as a comparison group. Table One illustrates the results obtained on the nutrition knowledge section of the questionnaire.

TABLE 1. Nutrition Knowledge of Health Science Students

	Percentage Correct Response		
	1st Year	Final Year (except Nutrition & Dietetics)	Final Year (Nutrition & Dietetics)
Vitamins and minerals	62%	73%	91%
Obesity, reduction diets	73%	81%	96%
Heart disease	82%	86%	94%
Nutrient needs	60%	66%	95%
Food quality & nutrient content	51%	58%	88%
Needs of children	84%	90%	95%

Differences between both groups of students in each section of knowledge were significant, with the exception of heart disease.

Twelve per cent of students weighed more than 110% of ideal weight. These students had greater nutrition knowledge than other students. A majority of obese students claimed that they were on a reducing diet at the time. Ninety per cent of the obese group felt that they were overweight.

The questionnaire showed that senior health science students lacked knowledge in several areas of nutrition related to health promotion. Only 50% of health science students felt that sufficient teaching in nutrition had been included in their course.

DUGDALE, A.E., CHANDLER, D. & BAGHURST, K.I. (1978) Food and Nut.Rev. 35: 89.

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