
**Knowledge and attitudes among final year students of a Sri Lankan
Medical Faculty on nutritional assessment and counseling**

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Nutritional assessment and counseling are core clinical skills expected from a medical graduate. Our objective was to describe the knowledge and attitudes on nutritional assessment and counseling among final year medical students. Since self-perceived scores are influenced by non-test-relevant response determinants, we also intended to examine the effect of social desirability bias on self-reported knowledge and attitudes to control for overestimation.

A random sample of final year medical students of a Sri Lankan Medical Faculty was assessed using a self-administered questionnaire. Knowledge and attitudes on nutrition were measured using a modified 17-item Nutrition in Patient Care Survey questionnaire. A 13-item Malrowe-Crowne instrument was used to assess the social desirability. Questions were in English language. Face validity of the above tests was established.

Of 88 respondents, 62.2%(n=56) were females. The mean age was 25.1±0.9 years. Seven (7.8%) had participated in some kind of special projects in nutrition. Forty-three (47.8%) had close friends/relatives with a medical condition which needed greater than normal attention to nutrition. Mean knowledge score was 65.5%±8.9%. Mean positive attitudes score was 61.1%±6.5%. Although 85.6%(n=77) agreed that nutritional assessment should be included in any routine consultation, 53.3%(n=48) agreed that most final year medical students are not adequately trained to discuss nutrition issues with patients. Pearson's test found no correlation between attitudes and self-reported knowledge ($r=.041$, $n=88$, $p>.05$). Student's t-tests did not show significant differences of knowledge or attitudes depending on sex, participating in some kind of special projects in nutrition, or having a close friend/relative with a medical condition which needed greater than normal attention to nutrition($p>.05$). The internal consistency of the SD scale (Cronbach's alpha) was 0.56. Results of a simple linear regression analysis predicting knowledge and attitudes score from SD score did not show a statistically significant association ($F(1,74) = .050$, $p>.05$, $R^2=.001$, $R^2_{Adjusted}=-.013$).

Perceived knowledge and positive attitudes on nutritional assessment and counseling is inadequate among final year medical students. The findings of this study do not support the presence of social desirability bias in students' reporting of knowledge and attitudes.

Keywords: *Nutrition, medical students, Malrowe-Crowne social desirability scale*

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