

PP 29: Knowledge, attitudes and practices on the use of European Number System and International Numbering System for coding food additives, among medical students of the Faculty of Medicine, University of Kelaniya.

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Introduction: E number system (ENS) and international numbering system (INS) are used in coding food additives (FA). FAs are substances added to the packaged food to preserve their flavor, smell, appearance and structure. Though, use of FAs are permitted by law, long term consumption is linked with a range of health issues such as allergies, obesity and cancers. Unfortunately, despite the evidence, consumers' knowledge on this area is alarmingly low.

Objectives: To assess the knowledge, attitudes and practices (KAP) on the use of ENS/INS for coding FAs among medical undergraduates of the Faculty of Medicine, University of Kelaniya

Methods: This descriptive cross-sectional study was conducted among 384 students selected using stratified random sampling. Demographic and KAP data were obtained using self-administered questionnaire and was analysed using descriptive statistics. SPSS software version 25 was used.

Results: Majority of the participants were aware of the FA (91.66 %). They read the package label (95.31 %), and valued quality over price irrespective of their gender, maternal education level and family's monthly income ($p > 0.05$). But 99.48% of the participants were ill-informed of FA coding systems and didn't take ENS/INS into consideration when purchasing packaged food. While most participants (97.40%) were aware of the negative health effects of FAs, they lacked knowledge to correlate information embedded in ENS/INS with health and only 72.92% was willing to improve their knowledge.

Conclusions: There is a general lack of knowledge amongst the respondents about INS/ENS and associated health risks. Increasing their KAP will be beneficial to all stakeholders including future patients.

Keywords: Food additives, European Number System, International Numbering System, knowledge, attitudes, practices, medical students