

Culinary medicine programs aim to improve nutrition education for doctors

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UTSW's Culinary Medicine team provides education in teaching kitchens for medical students, residents, fellows and other health professionals. Credit: UT Southwestern Medical Center

Culinary medicine programs are emerging at medical schools to meet a

critical need to improve nutrition education in an era of unprecedented diet-related health problems including obesity and cardiovascular disease, according to a review of programs by UT Southwestern researchers published in *Academic Medicine*.

The programs utilize teaching kitchens to give [health professionals](#) practical skills to help patients make evidence-based dietary changes while celebrating nourishing, accessible, affordable, and [delicious food](#), said lead author Jaclyn Albin, M.D., Associate Professor of Internal Medicine and Pediatrics who leads the Culinary Medicine program at UT Southwestern.

"This work is the very first scoping review of medical school-based Culinary Medicine programs in the U.S.," Dr. Albin said. "We anticipate this to be a pivotal resource for the many medical schools seeking to launch programs and needing a collated literature base as well as information about funding, assessment strategies, and lessons learned."

UT Southwestern has been an innovator in this field. Since starting its program in 2015, UTSW's Culinary Medicine team has delivered interprofessional education in teaching kitchens across Dallas-Fort Worth to [medical students](#), residents, fellows, other health professionals, and patients. More recently, the Culinary Medicine teams launched a clinical service line that delivers virtual consultations with other health care providers. One-on-one visits between patients and registered dietitians and group cooking classes are expected to begin over the next several months.

To train the next generation of health professionals, Dr. Albin collaborates with dietitian Milette Siler, M.B.A., RD, LD, to lead classes for medical and graduate students, residents, and fellows across the UT Southwestern campus.

"I have always had a passion for teaching students and patients about nutrition, lifestyle, and other environmental influences on health," said Dr. Albin. "This has become increasingly complex as more patients face food allergies and intolerances, special dietary or nutritional needs, diseases like irritable bowel syndrome, and much more."

The researchers identified 34 medical student-focused culinary medicine courses, utilizing a variety of curricular and assessment strategies that lack standardization and measurement of competencies. While the programs have a positive impact on student wellness and nutrition knowledge, they struggle with adequate funding and faculty support.

Dr. Albin said the time is ripe for increased support. Suboptimal diets are well established as a [driving force](#) for increased morbidity in obesity, [cardiovascular disease](#), and Type 2 diabetes, and the COVID-19 pandemic revealed the relevance of metabolic health in food insecure communities.

"Food is the top risk factor for [early death](#) in the U.S., and culinary medicine could transform the problem into the solution," Dr. Albin said.

More information: Courtney Newman et al, Culinary Medicine as Innovative Nutrition Education for Medical Students: A Scoping Review, *Academic Medicine* (2022). [DOI: 10.1097/ACM.0000000000004895](#)

Provided by UT Southwestern Medical Center

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