

# Nutrition education should be 'on the menu' of all healthcare professionals' education—new research

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All healthcare professionals should study a curriculum of nutrition education during their studies in order to help better support public

health—new paper suggests.

Nutritional researchers from Aston University, with colleagues from other universities and leading nutritional groups, worked with the Association of Nutrition (AfN) to help develop a [curriculum](#) that can be rolled out amongst all undergraduate medical school students with potential for modules to be taught to other healthcare professional courses.

The paper jointly published in the *British Journal for Nutrition* and *BMJ Nutrition, Prevention and Health* examined the development of a new curriculum aimed at undergraduate medical students and made recommendations on its roll out nationally, with a view to it subsequently being implemented into other healthcare courses.

The AfN Undergraduate Curriculum in Nutrition for [medical doctors](#) has been designed to be presented to medical students as an integral part of their general undergraduate training, making it clear how nutrition interrelates with the study of other systems and contributes to an inclusive understanding of [health](#) and disease.

Dr. Duane Mellor, clinical dietitian and senior lecturer at Aston Medical School at Aston University and co-author on the paper, said:

"At present, lifestyle related health problems from living with obesity, through to high blood pressure, type 2 diabetes, heart disease and several cancers can all be linked to diet across our communities. Whereas in hospitals around a third of patients coming in can be undernourished.

"Nutrition and food play a key role to both keeping us healthy and helping to manage disease, which is why it is imperative we educate our future doctors and other [health professionals](#) about the role of nutrition in patient care."

The paper sets out not only the need for nutrition education and the gaps, but how it can be included as part of what is already a very busy and content heavy curriculum. It builds on areas of the curriculum where nutrition could even be used to help teach concepts such as epidemiology.

It highlights how historically [medical education](#) along with the education of many health professionals not specialising in nutrition often have only a few hours of teaching on the subject.

Dr. Glenys Jones, deputy chief executive at the Association for Nutrition, who led the curriculum development project and is co-author on the recent paper, said:

"Nutrition is a key and modifiable determinant of health and wellbeing, therefore it is essential our future medical and [healthcare professionals](#) are equipped to be able to identify when nutrition could be involved in a patient's condition in order for this to form part of their care.

"The curriculum is not designed to turn our doctors into nutritionists or dietitians, but to give them the knowledge and skills to be able to think about whether nutrition could be playing a role and having the confidence and knowledge of who, when and how to refer on to suitable nutrition professionals when this is needed."

Aston University is a pioneer in the key area of nutrition education of the future healthcare workforce. As one of few UK universities with a dietitian or nutritionist as part of the teaching team within its medical school, these skills are now being developed to benefit the training of other health professionals.

Dr. Mellor added: "As one of a few dietitians and nutritionists embedded into the teaching team at Aston Medical School, we have been able to

integrate nutrition across our curriculum.

"It is great to be able to highlight how nutrition links to the basic science areas such as biochemistry through to how you can encourage a patient to think about changing their diet in clinical skills'.

Aston University has also started to explore with the Association for Nutrition the potential need for nutrition education in other professions. From this an outline of a core curriculum for nutrition for a range of health professionals is in development.

Dr. Mellor also plans to work with colleagues to further develop nutrition teaching at Aston University, thus helping students across subjects such as optometry and pharmacy to gain a better understanding of nutrition and how it impacts on their areas of expertise.

For more information about Aston Medical School please visit our website.

**More information:** Glenys Jones et al, Putting nutrition education on the table: development of a curriculum to meet future doctors' needs, *British Journal of Nutrition* (2022). [DOI: 10.1017/S0007114522001635](https://doi.org/10.1017/S0007114522001635)

Glenys Jones et al, Putting nutrition education on the table: development of a curriculum to meet future doctors' needs, *BMJ Nutrition, Prevention & Health* (2022). [DOI: 10.1136/bmjnph-2022-000510](https://doi.org/10.1136/bmjnph-2022-000510)

Provided by Aston University

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