Most medical students overconfident, underprepared on nutrition guidelines
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Ohio University researchers found medical students may be more confident than knowledgeable when it comes to nutrition. Of the 257 medical students studied, more than 55 percent were confident they could counsel patients on nutritional recommendations, but half did not achieve a passing score on a nutrition quiz, according to a study published in *The Journal of the American Osteopathic Association*.

Of particular note, only 12 percent were aware of Dietary Reference Intakes (DRIs), a key guide to differentiated nutrition requirements, although more than 68 percent agreed that primary care physicians should counsel patients about nutrition.

"There is a long-standing disconnect in medicine. Nutrition is understood to be integral to overall health, but it is not given serious attention in physician education," said Elizabeth Beverly, PhD, the lead author of this study and assistant professor at Ohio University Heritage College of Osteopathic Medicine. "The lack of knowledge about dietary reference intakes, which tell physicians what kind of nutrient and energy intake their patients need, is concerning because the guidelines vary dramatically by age, sex, and other factors, like pregnancy and disease."

Prior research has shown that physicians who are overly confident are less likely to seek additional resources and more likely to misdiagnose patients. Researchers expressed concern that overconfident medical students may not attempt to further understand or explore important nutritional recommendations when treating patients in the future.

The National Academy of Science recommends 25 hours of nutrition education for physicians. However, multiple studies have confirmed that most medical schools fall significantly short of that goal.

Beverly and her co-authors recommend developing nutrition-related competencies, as well as including nutrition questions on board certification examinations, to help ensure that schools adhere to the minimum number of hours of nutrition education.

"Medical schools are focused on preparing students to pass board certification exams. Currently, nutrition knowledge is not evaluated by most certification boards," says Beverly. "If we can change that, schools will adjust their curriculum accordingly and we should ultimately see an improvement in patient education and care."


Provided by American Osteopathic Association