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## Eat well project: does nutrition education impact dietary perceptions and behaviours of NHS staff?

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Basic understanding and education of healthy dietary patterns is lacking amongst doctors and other healthcare professionals<sup>1</sup>. This issue is exacerbated by a food environment where ultra-processed foods are readily available across most hospitals and in the community<sup>2</sup>. Moreover, due to increased social media use and rise of fad diets, supplement, and fitness industries; it has become increasingly difficult to educate oneself about which dietary patterns are optimal for health<sup>3,4</sup>. This project aims to assess the current perception amongst staff of what a healthful diet is and to determine whether providing up-to-date nutrition evidence impacts their perception and food choices.

This was a pre-post study design undertaken at University Hospital Ayr's Emergency Department and included staff in different roles and grades. Staff members (n = 17) completed a self-assessed preliminary survey of mixed questions, most questions were yes or no answers with optional comment boxes. The questionnaire was created in house and asked ten questions about participants perception of their own food behaviours and environment. The group had three educational sessions over a four week period centred around whole-food plant-based diets, gut health, wellbeing and macro and micronutrients. The group (n = 15) then completed a similar follow-up questionnaire on how their perception and food behaviours had changed.

In this study, all participants who completed the final questionnaire (n = 15) have changed the way they think about food. This has been reflected in many of their food behaviours with 93% (n = 14) of participants reporting a change to their diet. Following intervention, all participants reported an increased awareness around the relationship between the food they consume, their mental wellbeing and its effect on chronic disease compared with only 53% and 65% respectively, at the beginning of the study.

Participants perceptions around getting the appropriate levels of certain nutrients changed after intervention; there was an increase in participants reporting a lack of dietary fibre (24% pre vs 60% post) and plant diversity (0% pre vs 20% post). Conversely, there was a drop in participants reporting that their diets contained too many carbohydrates (41% vs 6%). All participants went onto share what they had learned with someone close to them whilst 33% shared what they had learned with a patient.

In this study, educating staff on current nutrition evidence proved as an effective tool to encourage staff to make more informed choices and increase awareness about the link between dietary behaviour, food environment and their health.

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### References

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