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## Empowering pharmacy professionals to enhance public health nutrition: a mixed methods study

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Unhealthy dietary patterns stand as the foremost risk factor for noncommunicable disease-associated morbidity and mortality<sup>(1)</sup>. As widely accessible healthcare providers, pharmacy professionals' potential to catalyze improvements in public health nutrition is substantial, offering a means to combat the escalating epidemic of obesity and NCDs through tailored interventions, services, and education<sup>(2,3)</sup>.

Our study employed a mixed-methods approach to assess the role of pharmacy professionals in promoting nutrition advice and healthy dietary practices.

An online questionnaire (N=200) was designed and conducted to evaluate pharmacy professionals' nutrition knowledge, the advice given in various diet-related conditions (e.g. obesity, type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular disease risk factors, malnutrition, sustainable diets), practices in delivering diet-related guidance within their routine practice and perceived roles and future ambitions of pharmacy professionals towards nutrition counselling, yielding both quantitative and qualitative insights.

Subsequently, qualitative interviews and focus group discussions (N=19) were conducted, engaging pharmacists, nutritionists and dietitians to gather insights essential for the development of a comprehensive nutrition toolkit tailored for pharmacy practice.

These interviews delved deeper into the subject, with the goal of designing a nutrition toolkit that empowers pharmacists with the knowledge, tools, and resources needed to play a more active and impactful role in promoting nutrition and healthy lifestyle practices among their patients. Thematic analysis was conducted, and emerging themes and subthemes were identified.

Our findings indicate that a significant portion of participants in our study are involved in providing nutrition and diet advice for various health conditions. The majority of pharmacists considered diabetes programmes having a high level of importance (84%), followed by weight management services (78%), hypertension management (86%), and healthy diet campaigns (63.5%). However, our knowledge and confidence rating questions revealed a significant gap in training and a clear need for educational materials tailored for pharmacists to enhance their ability to provide nutrition advice effectively. Key themes identified in open-text questions were referrals and collaboration, training and education needs, wider needs (changes in the public health system, materials/resources, integration and implementation of nutrition in pharmacy practice) and perceived roles as pharmacists in providing nutrition advice (patient support, feeling responsible, specialised focus areas).

Qualitative findings underscore the pressing demand for nutrition training and education to deliver comprehensive services, as well as the necessity for collaborative efforts with dietitians and nutritionists to ensure effective care and the improvement of referral pathways in pharmacy practice.

This research contributes to the advancement of public health nutrition by recognizing the potential role of pharmacy professionals as key players in the dissemination of nutrition knowledge and fostering healthy behaviours within the community. The results will guide us in the collaborative development of a nutrition toolkit tailored for pharmacy practice, employing a co-design approach.

### References

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