

Abstract

Dietetic Educators' Perspectives on the Ways in Which Leadership Is Demonstrated by Dietetic Students and Interns: Insights from a Canadian Study [†]

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Abstract: *Background and objectives:* As food and nutrition experts, dietitians are key to quality care for numerous patients and clients. Dietitians continue to find their place within the health care hierarchy and the ways in which they can be recognized as leaders in the healthcare system. In Canada, there is a new competency domain related to dietetic leadership; however, little is known about Canadian dietitians' leadership development. The objective was to develop a foundational understanding of how leadership skills are currently taught through dietetic education in Canada. *Methods:* A documentary analysis of 13 Canadian dietetic programs and a focus group interview with dietetic educators was conducted as one phase of a doctoral study. The interview was recorded and transcribed verbatim. A data extraction tool was used to analyze the program documents, and thematic analysis was conducted on the interview transcript. *Results:* Findings from the documentary analysis provided a snapshot of how leadership was developed in students, considering leadership was not a core competency at the time of the data collection and analysis. Focus group participants agreed with the documentary analysis findings. They talked about how personal characteristics can be developed and shared examples of how they have seen students develop their leadership skills throughout their educational experience. There was no evidence that each program had a specific definition or conceptual framework for leadership; however, some of the educators talked about distributed leadership as important to dietetic practice. Where the focus group participants began to diverge from the preliminary findings was when they began to talk about specific program elements such as curricula, program or institution requirements, and education needs requirements. *Discussion:* Dietetic educators suggest that students demonstrate leadership through their ability to critically reflect, collaborate with other classmates, and develop and implement comprehensive plans. The main way dietetic students gain leadership skills outside of the program is primarily through extracurricular activities. Many of these activities are within, but not limited to, the nutrition and dietetics profession. Dietetic educators agreed that leadership can be developed in dietetic students, although some leadership characteristics are important when applying to a program.

Keywords: dietetics; leadership development; professional competence; health professions education



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