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Nutrition Education and Counseling (NUTR 420) City as Classroom Project Report

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Classroom Project

Using the City and Region as an Instructional Resource



Jule Anne Henstenburg, Director, Nutrition Program

Course Description

Nutrition Education and Counseling (Nutrition 420) is a senior-level nutrition course for students to develop and demonstrate counseling skills, education methods, and communication strategies for effective health behavior change. As part of the City and Region initiative, the course focused on cultural diversity and health disparities in a senior population of Philadelphia.



Project Description

Students conducted nutrition counseling and education sessions with seniors who were of Asian, African, and Eastern European descent at the Nationalities Senior Center in Philadelphia. The instructor divided the class into groups of three and used a public-health approach from Senior and Cultural Food Pyramid Models to provide education on hydration, fruits and vegetables, protein/Vitamin B12, fiber, Vitamin D, and exercise/movement. Students constructed stations that highlighted each topic in pictures and illustrations because many of the clients were non-English-speaking or spoke English as a second language. Each student met one-on-one with a senior while the group observed the interaction. A translator helped with some clients which was a unique challenge in communication. The instructor observed each student's skill and helped the counseling process as needed. Students used cultural food pyramids in clients' native languages to supplement nutrition education. A food station demonstrated cultural foods with nutrient content pertaining to counseling topics and provided Clementine oranges as a thank you to participating seniors.

Outcomes

The students received positive comments about the nutrition information they provided and an invitation to return to the Nationalities Senior Center in the future. The instructor noted growth in students' professionalism including personal appearance and demeanor. All groups exhibited knowledge and skills learned and practiced in class including food behavior, communication styles, interviewing skills, cultural competency, literacy, and the nutrition counseling process.

Lesson(s) Learned

Students appreciated the real-life setting for learning and enjoyed their interactions with the seniors. In their personal reflections about the experience, they admitted being nervous and hesitant about working with real clients, especially from other cultures. Next semester, the instructor will take students to the Nationalities Senior Center for a cultural holiday celebration, the Chinese Moon Festival, before the counseling and education project is conducted.

Student Feedback/ Comments:

M.B. “My experience at the Nationalities Senior Center was both fun and educational, which helped improve my nutrition counseling skills with clients...Although (class) role-playing offers some practice for counseling, I do not think it offers an accurate depiction of what happens in conversations with patients and clients because you know your classmates already...As a whole, I enjoyed working with my group and spending time with the clients at the Nationalities Senior Center”.

N.P. “I must say that at first, I was a little intimidated by this field trip and I was not sure how I was going to be able to communicate with people who needed translators or who spoke very little English. However, after sitting down with our first client, I instantly became very comfortable with the idea and realized it was not as hard as I expected...Overall, I felt pretty comfortable with this population at the (Nationalities) Senior Center. After seeing about 7 people, we realized how different each and every one of them was.”