

Title of Project: In the Nutri-Know: Nutrition Literacy and Health Promotion in Gainesville, Florida
Country: USA
Sponsoring College: The University of Florida (UF)
Project Leader: Malinda Gong
June 30 – August 18, 2021

Proposal Narrative

1) Context:

Diet and nutrition are inextricably linked to health outcomes and play vital roles in the prevention and management of chronic diseases such as cardiovascular disease, diabetes, and certain types of cancer. Rates of these chronic diseases have become increasingly prevalent, especially among low-income adults, and contribute to premature mortality, morbidity, and disability incidence. Nutrition is a key modifiable risk factor that can prevent these adverse chronic health outcomes, yet unfortunately there are many barriers to consuming a healthy diet. Among many communities, one such barrier is low nutrition literacy. Nutrition literacy, under the broader scope of health literacy, is defined as an individual's cognitive ability to access, understand and use nutrition information. Low nutrition literacy is associated with detrimental dietary behaviors that lead to adverse health outcomes. Furthermore, it is perpetuated by societal health disparities - low income and under-resourced communities face increased barriers to consuming a nutritious diet, such as cost, time, and food accessibility. As a Nutritional Sciences student minoring in Health Disparities and Sociology, nutrition literacy and community health have always been special interests of mine. The **In the Nutri-Know** project aims to enhance nutrition literacy in the Gainesville community through the implementation of an eight-week, eight-session Nutrition Education program in collaboration with local free clinics and the UF Food Science and Human Nutrition (FSHN) department. This initiative seeks to empower patients and community members with the nutritional knowledge and tools they need to make health-promoting dietary modifications.

2) The Solution:

In the Fall semester, I created a nutrition education student initiative (In the Nutri-Know), and our founding team (which included my project teammate Kate and myself) began our first project collaborating with the Equal Access Clinic Network (EACN) – a free UF-run clinic network serving underserved patients – to develop and distribute nutrition-related educational materials such as infographics to their patients. These materials were tailored to the needs of the patients, taking into consideration their health literacy level and other socioeconomic factors. Through our collaboration with the EACN, we learned from the clinic director, providers, and patients that many patients do not get exposure to nutrition counselling and education during clinic visits, despite how integral of a role nutrition has in many health conditions. From this, we realized that there was a need in the community and decided to expand the services of In the Nutri-Know beyond infographics and create an in-person Nutrition Education program for Gainesville's underserved patients. The classes will be held once a week, over eight weeks.

From input we received in the Fall, healthcare providers often face time limitations and are unable to provide their patients with explanations about diet's effect on health. This is where our Nutrition Education program will be an asset. Clinics like EACN can refer their patients to our program, so that they can receive more in-depth explanations about nutrition concepts and practical information about how to make healthy eating attainable and sustainable. To implement

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this program, we will continue our partnership with EACN to connect with their patients and assess their needs. Through their feedback, we will identify topics and barriers to consuming a nutritious diet and incorporate these topics into our Nutrition Education program curriculum, which will be reviewed and approved by nutrition and health disparities professionals by May 2021. Along with EACN, our project will be implemented in collaboration with UF graduate dietetics students, who will be facilitating the lessons under the supervision of a nutrition professional. Our project advisor is a faculty member and nutrition professor at UF and will facilitate these connections and oversee the training of the volunteers (May – June 2021).

For location, the EACN has generously offered us space in their Eastside clinic location. We chose this host site deliberately, knowing that it would likely be easy to access by most of our patients who already go there for care and/or live in the surrounding area. The clinic has multiple rooms, so we will be able to plan our lessons with appropriate COVID-19 safety guidelines in place. Furthermore, we will also hold a “Children’s Corner” in a separate area of the clinic, with qualified volunteers supervising and engaging in activities. With this childcare option included in our plans, we hope to address some of the potential logistical concerns of our participants and allow them to come in without the stress of childcare on their minds.

In our view, the concept of peace signifies the absence of distress and disruption. Clearly, poor health and illness is a universal experience, and one that invokes a great deal of discomfort, distress, and disruption to daily life. **We want to empower individuals with nutrition education that allows them to take control of their health through their diet and understand, prevent or manage diet-related health conditions. Through this objective, we hope to foster peace within these individuals and on a larger scale, reduce the burden of preventable chronic disease on our society and healthcare system.**

3) Assessment and Sustainability

Our overarching goal is to ensure that our project helps the Gainesville community and is sustainable over the long-term. By establishing a strong and enduring partnership between the In the Nutri-Know student initiative, the UF FSHN department, and the EACN, our objective is to create a long-standing Nutrition Education program to serve patients in Gainesville. EACN is enthusiastic about the new permanent addition to their current Health Education course offerings. The Nutrition Education classes can also serve as valuable learning opportunities for UF undergraduate and graduate students to volunteer in the community and work among patients. These relationships and the mutually beneficial nature of the classes will contribute to the sustainability of the project.

To ensure that our Nutrition Education program is serving the community effectively, participants will complete a survey at the end of the eight weeks to evaluate how their nutrition literacy level may have changed and how the program has affected their individual dietary habits and perspectives. We also plan to recruit some patients to take part in focus groups, so that we can collect specific feedback to improve and implement changes in our future classes.