

Eating behaviour evaluation following nutritional education interventions for health professionals

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Background

The “Work Programme - UN Decade of action on nutrition 2016 – 2025” highlights the importance of implementing Recommendation 19 of the Second International Conference on Nutrition of FAO and WHO related to nutrition education interventions (NEI) for health professionals (HP), in order to develop nutritional skills based on national dietary guidelines and coherent policies relating to food. The Local Health Agency integrated with Trieste University (ASUGI), since 2009, has performed 25 NEI with the formation of 910 HP. Post pandemic, the content of ASUGI’s last 6 NEI, programmed by the prevention plan of the Autonomous Region of Friuli Venezia Giulia, was aligned with the principles of the European Farm to Fork Strategy linked to Sustainable Healthy Diets guiding principles (SHD) published by FAO and WHO.

Objectives

The aims of the training programme (TP), named “Alimenta la Salute” (feeds the health), approved for Continuing Medical Education, was to change and evaluate food pattern behaviours of HP to adhere to the SHD. TP was characterized by a systemic view on complex interconnections between nutritional and sensorial food value, sustainability of food chain systems, evolution of urban food environments, as contexts into which SHD choices can be applied. The 2 day training program, spread over 14 hours with 40 participants, concluded with interactive work and experiences to applied knowledge and beginning to make informed healthy dietary choices in practice. To assess the change of food pattern behaviours, a questionnaire was administered at the beginning and again six months after the conclusion of the NEI.

The questionnaire was structured in 5 areas: 1 personal details (age, gender, family structure); 2 professional qualifications; 3 main sources of nutritional information; 4 eating behaviour during a typical day and a typical week (breakfast, snacks, type, frequency and variety of intake of food groups); 5 and purchasing modality in relation to: reading the label (ingredients and nutritional information), social and environmental sustainability.

Main topics:

- Food environment: a systemic analyses
- Nutritional recommendations
- Food advertising
- Food fake news
- Food safety
- Food labeling
- Food processing technique
- Food taste laboratory
- Sustainable development goals and the food chain
- Evolution of eating behaviors and food market
- Food quality
- Sustainable agriculture
- Traditional grains and legumes
- Community kitchens laboratory

Results

123 questionnaires were filled out by the participants (n=160) at the beginning of the TP, 63 questionnaires (51% of respondents) were returned after 6 months from the end of the NEI. 6 months after the conclusion of NEI it was reported that the percentage of HP who consumed the recommended portions of fruits and vegetables had increased from 62% to 70% and from 28% to 35% respectively. Those who consumed no cured meats, red meats or meals ready to heat / ready to re-heat / ready to consume, increased from 24% to 35%, from 20% to 25%, from 62% to 75% respectively (figure 1, 2).

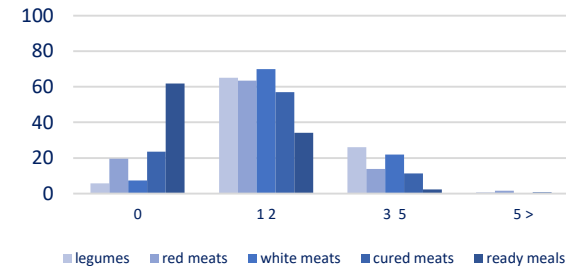


figure 1. Percentage frequency of weekly consumption of some food before the TP

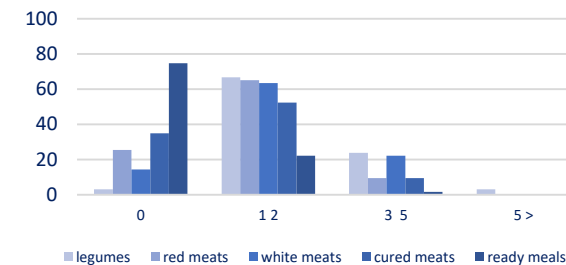


figure 2. Percentage frequency of weekly consumption of some food after 6 months the TP

Those who consumed 1 or 2 portions a week of cured meats or meals ready to eat / ready to re-eat / ready to consume, decreased from 57% to 52%, from 34% to 22% respectively. The percentage of HPs who read nutritional information or ingredient list on labels increased and from 45% to 56% and from 72% to 79% respectively. Relative to sustainable food choices, HPs who sometimes or often buy organic food have grown from 32% to 43% and from 30% to 32% respectively. While those who often choose local products have grown from 33% to 38% (figure 3, 4).

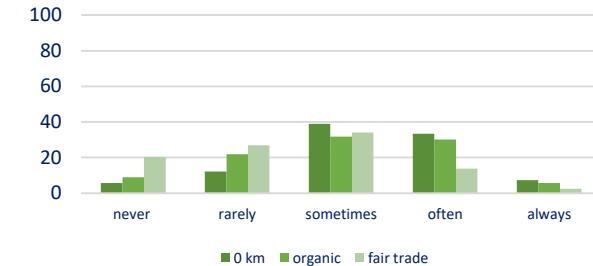


figure 3. Percentage frequency of purchase of fair trade, organic and 0 km food before the TP

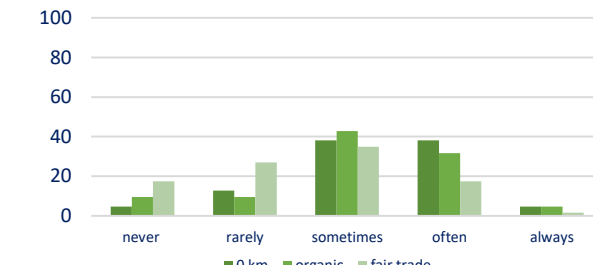


figure 4. Percentage frequency of purchase of fair trade, organic and 0 km food after 6 months the TP

Conclusions

The evaluation framework of the systemic structure of the training program has shown the effectiveness of the initiative in improving some areas of knowledge and healthy eating behaviors of health professionals. The results are important in applying the continuous improvement process of the program to better adhere to the entire framework of the principles of the European Farm to Fork Strategy linked to Sustainable Healthy Diets.