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A Novel Peer Mentor Model for Nutrition Education Within a Food Pantry

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Purpose: Food injustice and insecurity is an epidemic public health problem in the United States with social, educational, economic, and health outcome sequelae. Americans living food insecure have documented increased rates of obesity, hypertension, diabetes, hyperlipidemia, mental health issues, and increased rates of maternal morbidity and mortality. Families who suffer food insecurity rely on food assistance programs, such as emergency food pantries and Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Programs (SNAP). Historically emergency food pantries served families on a short-term basis, however in the current economic environment, these services are now long-term. **Methods:** Food insecurity has continued to increase over the past several decades and is often linked to negative health outcomes. To combat food insecurity, the number of food pantries has also grown in efforts to provide emergency food in these times of need. Nutrition education delivered within a food pantry is a suggested strategy to improve the diets of those who are food insecure. Additionally, this program evaluated the feasibility of utilizing peer mentors to deliver this type of nutrition education.

Results: *Community Cooks* is a peer mentor pilot program that was developed and implemented to determine the feasibility and sustainability of recruiting and retaining peer mentors to deliver a basic nutrition education program for the patrons. Eleven peer mentors were recruited for the program. Peer mentors were members or volunteers from this food pantry which ensured a relatability with their community. The design consisted of an interdisciplinary team of registered dietitians, nurse educators, and nursing students who taught peer mentors nutrition education content and recipe preparation in a sequence of three bi-weekly training sessions (9 total) followed by a live nutrition education workshop (3 total) open to all food pantry members. Each workshop featured at least three peer mentors from the larger group to serve as leaders for the larger workshop. One hundred percent participation and retention of the peer mentors was found based on the nine training sessions and three workshops. Peer mentors successfully conducted the workshops and played a vital role in the marketing, preparation, and content delivery of the workshop program. These results may suggest that the theoretical frameworks of Social Cognitive Theory and Socio-Ecological Model informed the development of *Community Cooks* peer mentor nutrition education program delivered within a food pantry as a valuable and sustainable approach to empower peer mentors to provide basic nutrition information within the food insecure and underserved population. **Conclusion:** Further research is needed to explore the continuous role peer mentors may have in this setting as well as measuring potential improvements in diets or health.

Title:

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Keywords:

Community Cooks, Emergency Food Pantry and Food insecurity

References:

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Abstract Summary:

Food insecurity has continued to increase. To combat food insecurity, the number of food pantries has increased. Nutrition education delivered within a food pantry is a suggested strategy to improve the diets of those who are food insecure. This presentation describes “Community Cooks”, which was a participatory-based quality improvement project

Content Outline:

1. Introduction to food insecurity
2. An overview of the relationship between food insecurity and health outcomes
3. A review of Community Cooks
4. Program design of Community Cooks
5. Current outcomes, future plans

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