

2015 ACFF Funded Project: Dietary analysis and nutritional counselling for caries prevention in community dental practice

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Dental practitioners agree that dietary analysis and nutritional counselling are essential for caries prevention, however they infrequently implement these methods due to a lack of confidence and competence. This study aimed to improve these practices through an online training module on using brief counselling methods and the use of a specific diet assessment of caries risk form.

Dentists, hygienists and oral health therapists were invited to participate.

- 41 dental practitioners completed a baseline survey on attitudes/barriers
- 31 accessed the online module
- 15 completed follow-up survey on attitudes/barriers

Feedback on the online module was very positive, with agreement that knowledge and skills developed along with an ability to apply learning to the clinical setting. There was a statistically significant improvement in dental hygienists and oral health therapist's confidence in providing dietary advice, after completing the online learning module.

Ten practitioners implemented the learning in practice with their patients (n=66), who consented to completing a caries risk assessment, received dietary counselling, and completed a follow-up risk assessment at 6 months. The most common advice given by dental practitioners was to use a straw when consuming sugary drinks (n=24) and to try to limit sugary drinks to meal times (n=22). Analysis of the data from the patients that completed both the baseline and follow up risk assessments, found statistically significant improvements in dietary behaviour, specifically the quantity, timing and exposure of sugary drinks.

It appears that a simple online learning module can improve dental practitioner's knowledge and confidence in providing dietary advice. Further, brief counselling methods in the dental setting can positively influence patient behavior.

Link to online learning module: <https://aelp.smartsparrow.com/learn/open/v6c8h575>

(Best viewed in Google Chrome)