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Nutritional Status of Food Insecure Older Adults

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Abstract

Approximately **9.8 million** seniors across America were at risk of going hungry in 2015. The percentage of seniors who faced the threat of hunger was equivalent to the percentage of seniors compared with the whole population of the United States. The prevalence rate of hypertension, which contributes to **heart attacks and strokes, is over 50%**, and the prevalence rate of **diabetes is over 25%** in seniors. Both heart disease and diabetes are among the top 10 leading causes of death in America with heart disease being number one. Appropriate dieting is recommended as a way to prevent and treat both of these diseases. The goal of this study is to determine the effectiveness of support offered by food banks to provide adequate nutrition to food insecure older adults. A total of 300 seniors will be assessed prior to their first use of food bank support and three months after initiation using the Mini Nutritional Assessment. The data will be analyzed using descriptive statistics.

Introduction

- **33%** of households served by U.S. food banks have at least one member over the age of 60
- **41%** of the households served have a member with **diabetes**
- **77%** have a member with **hypertension**

The geriatric population are at an increased risk for malnutrition because of the comorbid and chronic health conditions that follow age. Various medical conditions can lead to an impaired taste, a decrease in the sense of smell, and widespread dental problems further encouraging malnutrition. The implementation of regular nutritional screenings and evaluations within food banks can help to rid the geriatric population of health disparities. Overall, the researchers plan to conduct this study to enhance the health of the seniors who require nutritional support from food banks.

Research Question

Does the nutritional support provided by food banks meet the nutritional needs of older adults to have a positive effect on their nutritional status?

Methods

Design:

Before and after testing

Sample:

- 300 new senior food bank clients
- Focus on food-insecure older adults (55+)
- Criteria for inclusion: age of 55+, need for food assistance, use of at least one of the food bank programs offered.

Data collection:

Mini nutritional assessment (questionnaire)

- Assesses anthropometric measurements, diet, independence and mobility, and personal view of health
- Tested before food bank intervention and 3 months after initial use of food bank support

Expected Findings

- Support provided by local food banks does not meet nutritional recommendations for seniors
- Lack of proper nutrition resulting in increased risk for malnourishment and further complications
- Nutritional status evaluation using the Mini Nutritional Assessment (MNA) will show a necessity for interventions to improve health of elderly using food bank resources
- Awareness of decreased nutritional status among seniors using food bank services to urge the initiation of educational and nutritional interventions



Interprofessional Roles and Responsibilities

- Interprofessional collaboration with counselors can have a positive impact on the mental and physical health of seniors in need of food assistance
- Adverse effects of food insecurity include depression, anorexia, mental impairments, and mood or personality disorders
- Counselors will work with nurses to alleviate the emotional and mental burden seniors with food insecurity endure
- Additionally, counselors can integrate themselves into the assessment process upon initiation of food bank services to quickly identify and assist high-risk individuals
- Counseling services within the food bank system can provide a necessary intervention for older adults unable to provide for themselves

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