

Project title: Nutrition education campaign in the low socioeconomic communities in the North East of Pretoria (Empower poor Africans with nutrition education)

Executive Summary

Unhealthy eating is one of the main causes of non-communicable diseases (NCDs) such as diabetes, hypertension, stroke, heart diseases, and certain cancers. NCDs rank among the 10 leading causes of deaths in South Africa as reported by Statistic South Africa. Good nutrition knowledge accompanied by healthy eating contributes to reducing individual's risk for NCDs. This project will implement a nutrition education campaign among the low socioeconomic communities in Pretoria North East. We will conduct NCDs risk assessment through the non-invasive body composition measurement, individual nutrition counselling and group nutrition education. Nutrition counselling and education will be based on the South African Food-Based Dietary Guidelines (SAFBDGs). It is envisaged that about 10000 individuals in the target population will be reached per year. As a result, the healthy eating messages will be propagated; people will be empowered with appropriate knowledge and practices for reducing their risks for NCDs.

Background

Food-related non-communicable diseases such as diabetes, hypertension, heart diseases and obesity are of public health concern globally and South Africa is not spared. A World Health Organisation (WHO)'s survey of more than 35,000 people aged 50 and over in South Africa, China, Ghana, India, Mexico and Russia reported that 78 per cent of those who participated in South Africa had hypertension¹.

Nutrition education is one of the most enduring, effective and economic interventions to fight malnutrition and food-related diseases through the impartation of nutrition knowledge and skill in healthy eating^{2,3}. The WHO Global Action Plan for the Prevention and Control of NCDs 2013–2020 identifies the importance of nutrition education in its recommendation for nation states to 'Create health- and nutrition-promoting environments'⁴. Providing the appropriate levels of nutrition education will enable individuals to make healthy food choices⁵.

Nutrition education campaign needs to be particularly targeted at disadvantaged groups, such as those of low socioeconomic background. Low socioeconomic status is often associated with higher levels of NCDs. Research evidence has shown how nutrition education campaign

helped to improve nutrition knowledge and facilitate behaviour change, especially among low-SES participants⁵. This project will contribute to realising the sustainable development goal 3; ensuring healthy lives and promoting well-being for all at all ages by reducing premature mortality from non-communicable diseases through prevention.

Aim: To conduct a nutrition education campaign among people with a low socioeconomic background in Pretoria North in order to increase awareness about healthy eating.

Objectives

To conduct group seminars in nutrition education using the messages of the South African Food-Based Dietary Guidelines (SAFBDGs).

To assess the peoples' risk for NCDs using diet and family history.

To measure the peoples' body composition using the non-invasive body composition analyser.

To provide individualised nutrition counselling based on results.

To develop the healthy eating messages into songs in English, and the 11 official languages of South Africa.

To engage the media platform in disseminating the healthy eating messages.

Project Activities

In order to realise our objectives we will implement the following activities:

Short term

1. In consultation with the DoH, identify the main stakeholders, authorities and the actual communities where operations are to be carried out.
2. Engagement with the identified stakeholders (relevant government department, community leaders etc.) and authorities at the DoH to foster support.
3. Situation analysis of nutrition education at the healthcare facilities through a one-on-one interview with the health care providers.
4. Nutrition education seminars at the ward level to create awareness about healthy eating, NCD risks and the resources available for them to minimise risks.

5. Assessment of an individual's risks for NCDs by using the non-invasive body composition analyser.
6. Individualised nutrition counselling based on body composition using the healthy eating messages of the SAFBDGs.
7. Follow-up with communications through emails, SMS and WhatsApp to encourage compliance.

Long term

8. We will work with music experts to develop the messages of the SAFBDGs into songs in English, Zulu, Xhosa, Afrikaans, Northern Sotho, Tswana, Sotho, Tsonga, Swati, Venda and Ndebele.
9. We will engage the various communication platforms such as the Television, radio, print media, and social media to propagate the songs until the healthy eating messages become a household song in South Africa.

Benefits

1. **Improved nutrition knowledge:** The people will be educated about the diversity and the use of foods that are available within their locality.
2. **Dissemination of the messages of the SAFBDGs:** The project will enhance the propagation of healthy eating messages and the empowerment for behaviour change.
3. **Improving health.** The overall health of the people will improve as people embrace and practice healthy eating. Their risk for NCD could be reduced as they are empowered to identify and use available healthy foods in their locality.
4. **Capacity development and job creation:** The project will provide an opportunity for emerging nutritionists for capacity development in nutrition education and to provide the services to the people.
5. **Sustainability:** Knowledge acquired by the participants will be useful in benefiting their lives and those of their families. Also, there will be continued dissemination of the messages of the SAFBDGs to the general public once the music is developed, validated and launched.

The stakeholders in this project are the general public and the Department of Health. The community leaders involved would be the municipality mayors, councillors, community women leaders, head of religious organisations etc.

References

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