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Can dietetic-led nutrition education sessions lead to a change in midwifery practice?

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Good maternal nutrition is vital for positive pregnancy outcomes. However, midwives report a lack of confidence and skills regarding advising pregnant women about diet and weight during antenatal care⁽¹⁾. Research has shown that the delivery of nutrition education sessions for midwives can improve their knowledge and skills⁽²⁾, but there is no evidence that this leads to a change in practice. The aim of this study was to evaluate a series of nutrition education sessions for student midwives, delivered by a dietitian, to determine if it is likely to lead to a change in practice.

Final year student midwives (n = 33) were recruited during a final taught nutrition session at their university. They were asked to provide free-text feedback on anonymous post-it notes regarding their thoughts and feelings as to whether the taught nutrition sessions were likely to result in a change in their midwifery practice. The comments were collated and analysed thematically.

Three main themes were identified: 1) Nutrition as a priority 2) Personalised Nutrition 3) Sources of information and signposting.

Most students commented that they now viewed maternal nutrition as ‘important’ and intended to prioritise discussions about nutrition in their future practice. They realised that messages needed to be personalised “*It has made me aware to tailor advice to different women.*” They also appreciated that signposting women to reliable sources of information or other health professionals helped to support ‘evidence-based practice,’ and was an important part of their role: “*The additional resources and signposts were really helpful.*”

The results from this convenience sample of student midwives indicates promising findings that the taught nutrition sessions are likely to result in a positive change in practice. UK antenatal guidelines state that midwives should discuss nutrition, diet, and vitamin supplementation at booking-in appointments⁽³⁾, but earlier research suggests that this rarely happens⁽¹⁾. Nutrition education which is delivered by a dietitian and focuses on case studies and care pathways, appears to have empowered student midwives to consider incorporating some of this applied knowledge and advice into their practice.

References

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