



Episode 47 - Community Programs and Resources

Transcript

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My first job as a dietitian was in public health. One of my tasks was to run the Ask the Dietitian booth at Farmers Markets. In particular, I put together the nutrition facts for the produce we were promoting that month. So for example, if cucumber was the vegetable being promoted, I'd make something like a cucumber salad. And on top of the recipe, customers could take a Produce Pointer explaining the nutrient contents provided by cucumbers. I think back on those days and what we were working on from a public health perspective. Healthy Vending was a big one which was to provide healthy options in vending machines. Another initiative we were working was getting the nutrition information on the menu boards so that at any fast food restaurants, the information would be available to the public. That way they would know what they're eating and ordering. In most internship programs, there's a community nutrition rotation. It looks different for everyone depending on the site location but community outreach and public health are another area of nutrition where dietitians make a difference and where they shine.

Intro and Music

Hey there. A listener reached out to me and wanted a review of community resources. I thought it was a great topic to cover because these resources and programs are fair game on the the RD exam. So on today's episode of the RD Exam Made Easy Podcast, you're gonna get a review of resources available to the public. Most of these resources have eligibility criteria that you will need to know for the exam. Some states might have resources available that others don't and things often change so be sure to keep that in mind.

WIC

So I wanted to start with a program that's well known in the community. And that is WIC. WIC is regulated by the USDA and stands for Women, Infants, and Children. It serves pregnant, postpartum and breastfeeding women as well as infants and children up to 5 years of age. WIC provides food vouchers so they can purchase food that's offered under the program. Many times you'll see in grocery stores food items have a WIC logo underneath them which indicates that those items are available with a WIC voucher. WIC also provides formula for infants up until 1 year of age. The amount of formula provided decreases at 6 months which is when infants start to eat solid foods. I want to emphasize that WIC is a supplemental program. It's important to understand this because I've had many parents who were upset that their infant consumes more than the amount of formula provided by WIC so they would put more water in the formula to make it last longer. But this is dangerous and could lead to

electrolyte abnormalities which often results in hospitalization. So as dietitians and healthcare providers, we need to help people understand it's a supplemental program. It won't provide 100% of participants nutrient needs but it is a wonderful resource that covers a large amount of the nutrition needed for health and to support growth in young children. WIC teaches good nutrition practices and provides nutritious foods. So there's also an educational component and counseling is available if needed. It's not available to everyone. There's eligibility criteria for the program and the participants must be in need of nutrition support. Breastfeeding is encourage which is a passion of mine and WIC offers lactation support. Breastfeeding moms get additional food since they don't get formula package for their baby. As a dietitian, if you're curious and want to learn about prenatal problems in the community, WIC is a wonderful resource. When I worked in pediatrics, I contacted WIC often since I worked in a county facility where almost all of my patients were WIC participants. If I had to change a formula to something specialized, I wanted to make sure that formula would be available at WIC when the baby was discharged. So even if you work in one area of dietetics, our worlds cross and we count on each other for the greater good of our clients and patients. Also, WIC has a great collaboration with local Farmers Markets where participants can go to the Farmers Market and use their vouchers to purchase fresh fruits and vegetables. Not only are they shopping local, but they're supporting local farmers and they're getting nutritious foods. I love that so much. So that's WIC in a nutshell.

National School Lunch Program

Moving on to the National School Lunch Program which is also under the USDA. The National School Lunch Program provides lunch to grade school students from kindergarten through grade 12. It also may serve meals to residential facilities for adolescents. The quantity needed for each age group varies. So that means the quantity of food provided in elementary schools will be different than the portion sizes available in high schools. Having said that, it needs to meet 1/3 of the recommended intake for protein, Vitamin A, Vitamin C, Iron and Calcium. Vitamin C is often met by fruits and vegetables or 100% fruit juice which can be given to meet the Vitamin C requirements for the meal. So instead of giving fresh fruit, 100% fruit juice may be provided instead. Schools are reimbursed based on the number of meals served. I've noticed there's been some changes to the nutrient requirements so this is something just to keep in mind that there's updates happening all the time. The main thing is that the School Lunch Program provides food to children who might not otherwise have a nutrition meal to eat at lunch. So this in particular affects low income children. Even though I completed the dietetic internship many years ago, I still remember my school foodservice rotation. I remember being so surprised by how challenging it was to provide the nutrient requirements while staying within the budget and then also having to choose food from the list of foods available by the vendors. I can imagine it's become much more challenging with all the food shortages recently. So I want to recognize the dietitians working in school foodservice. The

children who participate in that program really benefit from the program. We know that hungry kids don't learn as well as kids who have food in their tummy so it's a great resource for so many of our families.

National School Breakfast Program

An extension or another program very similar to the School Lunch Program is the National School Breakfast Program. It's the same as the National School Lunch Program except instead of providing 1/3 of the dietary recommendations which is required in the lunch program, breakfast is required to provide 1/4 of the dietary recommendations for the same nutrients: protein, Vitamin A, Vitamin C, iron, and calcium.

After School Snack Program

And then for kids who participate in after school programs, the After School Snack Program has the same eligibility requirements as the National School Lunch Program and the programs are also reimbursed based on the number of snacks given. The goal of these programs is to provide nutritious foods to low income families who meet the income requirements. Some families will get free meals while others will get reduced priced meals. When the pandemic hit, kids weren't in school and that had an impact because children who would normally eat at school, were not getting those nutritious meals. So that brought awareness to how important these programs are. Recently many school districts provide meals free of charge to all children.

Summer Food Service Program

There's a couple other programs that might come up on the exam which is the Summer Food Service Program and the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program. The Summer Food Service Program is like an extension of the National School Lunch Program and it's goal is to provide meals to low income families during the summer months when school is not in session. Those meals are reimbursed and meals can also be provided through summer camps. This is helpful because if children are in need of nutritious lunches during the school year, nothing changes in the summer. They're still in need. And on top of the meals provided, the Nutrition Education and Training Program provides training to teachers and foodservice staff which is great. All hands on deck.

Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program

Before I move on, the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program introduces kids to fresh fruits and vegetables. So the name is pretty self explanatory. Use that to help you on the exam if you get a question about this program. The fresh fruits and vegetables not only helps decrease obesity, it also helps prevent chronic disease which we know as dietitians. This program is free to kids in elementary schools where school lunch is also provided. Some elementary schools also have a gardening program which exposes kids to not only fresh fruits and vegetables, but also teaches them how to grow their own garden which is really amazing because kids are sponges and they

learn a lot by observing other people and then participating with their hands. One of the activities I'd have my kiddos do when I was working in pediatrics was have them try a new fruit or vegetable every month. I'd give them a handout that had fruits and vegetables on it with a picture so they could choose something they're interested in trying. Then they could go online or find a recipe book that included that chosen fruit or vegetable for the month and then make that food item at home. It was always so fun when they'd come back and see me, they'd share how it went. Even if they didn't like it, that's ok. They looked at it. Smelled it. Touched it and even tried it. Super helpful and exposes them to something new. So this program validates the importance of fresh fruits and vegetables.

Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program

Let's move on to the Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program which gives grants to universities to train nutrition assistants who can then educate the public - in particular their focus is low income youth and adults. One of the listeners shared a test question she came across and wanted some clarification. The question asked about what resource provides grants to train people who can then educate the community. So the correct answer was the Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program. So if you're asked about a program that trains the trainer, keep this program in mind when looking at your possible answers. The goal of this program is for the trainers to teach ways to eat a healthy diet such as how to shop for food in the grocery store, how to meal plan and prepare meals, how to cook the meals and even how to create a budget around meal planning. So the focus is on food security, food safety, food resource management, diet quality, and physical activity. If a young adult female who's newly pregnant, doesn't have a job and doesn't know how to cook, this would be a great program for her. She could learn how to cook and prepare healthy meals for herself and her growing child. She could also be referred to WIC since it's for low income pregnant women too. A program that I was aware of when I worked in public health was the Promotora program which is where we partnered with people in the community. We trained volunteers in the community who then educated their community. Word of mouth is powerful and people who are known in their communities have already established trust and respect. So the communities are more likely to listen to them than to experts who don't know what it's like to live in their communities. It was a lot of fun and I loved how involved people got. So if you're asked about programs available in the community that teach low income people how to cook and plan, prepare a budget and grocery shop, the Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program is a great option.

Headstart

Headstart is another program that helps low income families by providing early childhood education to children ages 3 to 5 years old before they head to regular kindergarten and grade school. Good nutrition practices are taught in this program. I have to be honest and share that this was probably my favorite rotation in my

internship. I had a great preceptor so that definitely helped. She taught me so much and made the rotation so much fun. I got to educate families and do classes with the kids. I even volunteered to help implement a program that focused on structured and unstructured play. Headstart really does amazing work. Kids are smart and it's a great opportunity to teach healthy nutrition. Also, the nutrition activities should be related to food so they can learn all the colors of the rainbow. I hear about kids going home and educating their families which is so heartwarming. So adorable and shows the power of information in little growing minds.

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program

So all the program I just talked about primarily focus on children. But now I'm gonna move on to some programs available to adults too. Starting with the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program or more commonly known as SNAP. It's a federal assistance program that provides eligible low-income individuals and families with funds to purchase food. SNAP or food stamps is the largest food assistance program for people who meet the eligibility criteria. Eligibility criteria is based on household size and the amount of income earned to support that household. There are exceptions and variations based on factors like number of dependents, elderly or disabled individuals, and certain deductions. This program is kind of like a safety net program that assists those who are most in need. The primary mission is to ensure vulnerable populations have access to the nutrition they need in order to live healthy lives and to combat food insecurity. People who receive food stamps must have a net income at or below the poverty level. Say for example you're asked about a program you can refer a single mother to who has 3 teenage children between 13 and 16 years old who needs help feeding her family because she doesn't make enough money, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program would be a good option. You wouldn't choose WIC because WIC is for children up to 5 years old. And in this case, this single mother has teenagers so her kids are too old for her to receive WIC but they're are other programs like the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program that could help this single mother provide good nutritious foods to her children.

Senior Farmers Market Program

The Senior Farmers Market Program is exactly what the name of the program implies. This program provides low income seniors, which is defined as individuals 60 years and older, with coupons or vouchers that can be used to purchase food at Farmers Markets. This program supports local farmers and locally grown foods which is wonderful. That's how our communities thrive. And also this program has an educational component to it.

Congregate Meals

Moving on to the Congregate Meal Program. The Congregate Meal Program falls under the Older Americans Act Nutrition Program Title III. Home-delivered meals also fall under the Older Americans Act Nutrition Program. This program provides meals for seniors in a group setting such as at senior centers or churches. The meals are

hot meals, they're nutritious and they meet the USDA dietary guidelines. There are 3 main goals of the program. 1) To reduce hunger, food insecurity, and malnutrition. 2) To promote socialization. And 3) To promote the health and well-being of seniors by giving access to nutrition resources such as disease prevention and health promotion. Participants don't have to pay for the meals. Also, I've mentioned malnutrition in other episodes. There's a big focus on preventing malnutrition through programs like the Congregate Meal Program because we know the elderly are at increased risk of malnutrition. Malnutrition in the elderly can lead to poor outcomes and a downward spiral for many people which can sometimes be avoidable with good nutrition. So this program is great to ensure healthy, nutritious meals are available to the elderly. But more than just meals, the Congregate Meal Program provides classes, nutrition counseling and education. And since the meals are provided in a group setting, it encourages and supports social interaction.

When I think of this program, it makes me think of my grandma. She was a very independent woman. My grandpa passed away when I was around 10 or 11 years old. Around the same time that my grandpa passed away, the wife of one of their really close friends also passed away. So both widows got together. My grandma and this man named Bob. When I was little, I thought it was so nice that grandma had such a nice friend. But as I got older I started to see their relationship through a different lens and realized how beautiful their love story was. I loved my grandpa and I know my grandma did too but I think Bob was her true soulmate. I had just moved to the United States to go to school when Bob was diagnosed with cancer. And I was devastated. I was already home sick but to be away and find out that someone you love so much was sick back home, it just hurt so much. I went home that Christmas and Bob had had surgery a couple days before I got home for Christmas to remove the tumor but he passed away from complications from the surgery. I saw my grandma lose two men she loved so dearly but losing Bob was devastating - for her but for me too. Until the day my grandma passed away, she talked about how much she loved and missed Bob. I was home one summer and my grandma mentioned this man in her building had "taken a liking to her". Those were her words. She owned a condo in a building that was for residents 55 and older so there were plenty of people she could socialize with. But I thought it was so cute this man had taken a liking to her. My grandma was around 89, maybe 90 years old at the time. I was so intrigued by the conversation and to hear the emotions and feelings she had. It doesn't matter your age - people want to have connections. They want to be loved. And it feels really nice to be noticed. I think my grandma liked the idea that a man, and a younger man at that, was interested in her. But she had already had 2 life partners and lost both of them. She told me she wasn't interested in another relationship. She said, "dear, I don't want to have to take care of a man. Or to have to cook or clean. I just want to take care of myself". I asked her what she told him and she said, "I told him I'm not interested and to go across the street to the senior center. He could find himself a nice lady over there". I was cracking up and teased her about being such a heartbreaker. She smiled. I think she secretly liked that title. It meant she was in control and she knew what she wanted. She wanted to travel the

world, she wanted to do her own thing, spend time with her friends and family, eat what she wanted to eat with whoever she wanted to eat with. And that's exactly what she did until she passed away at almost 94 years old. The last few years of her life, she moved into an Assisted Living Facility that had games, community dining, laundry services, dancing, field trips, and she could even get her hair and nails done which was very important to her. At a New Year celebration, she was dancing with a friend and lost her footing. She fell and broke her hip. Everything went downhill from there. But she had a good story. If you're gonna fall and break your hip, it might as well be while dancing. As for the man who was interested in her, you better believe I followed up on what happened to him. He took her advice. He went to the senior center where he got to enjoy community meals, made new friends, played bridge, and he found himself a nice lady friend. Just like grandma said he would. Fortunately for my grandma, she had access to services that she needed in her later years. But you do need to keep in mind when working with the elderly and organizing programs for them that there's a means of transportation or a way for them to get to the program. Because the programs are great but you gotta make sure that the elderly can get there to use and participate in the programs. So socializing and eating as a group is so helpful for the mental health which is really what impacts the physical health in all populations but definitely in the elderly population.

CMS

And lastly, this program doesn't provide food but it does provide healthcare which is so important especially in the United States where universal healthcare is not an option. So let's talk about the centers for Medicare and Medicaid services or CMS. Medicare is health insurance for people over 65 years old. There's 2 parts to Medicare. Part A which is hospital insurance and Part B which is optional supplemental benefits. The process of enrollment can be very detailed and people may need help sometimes when choosing a plan. Medicaid is administered by states and it provides medical resources for all ages including dependent children. And here's a side note. In the healthcare world, if you ever hear this term, I want you to know what they're talking about. Medi/Medi is when people have Medicare/Medicaid coverage.

So there you have it. That's your review of some of the community programs and resources and the big impact they have on the lives of those they serve. Dietitians have a role in so many of these programs. I personally know many people who work for these programs and it gives them so much fulfillment and purpose knowing they're helping and supporting other people. And that's the beauty of dietetics. You can work in so many different areas and have a lasting impact.

Stay on top of your study game. There's no limits to achieving the success you so deeply desire. Until next time.