

NEW for the UAE
Nutrition Education and Well-being for the UAE
A Health and Nutrition Program for Students at Zayed University
by
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Statement of the Problem

Currently 50-60 percent of the population in the United Arab Emirates suffers from obesity. The Emirates Cardiology Society (2002) reported the UAE has the second highest rate of obesity internationally, after the United States. Overweight individuals are more likely to have high blood pressure, a major risk factor for heart disease and stroke, than individuals who are not overweight. Very high levels of cholesterol and triglycerides can also lead to heart disease and are often linked to being overweight. Being overweight also contributes to angina and sudden death from heart disease or stroke without signs or symptoms.

Studies of adolescent girls in all socio-economic groups in the Arab Gulf countries concluded the prevalence of obesity has increased, suggesting a predisposing factor for chronic diseases, such as heart disease, diabetes and hypertension (Musaiger, 1998). Some of the main reasons for increasing prevalence of overweight and obesity among teenage girls are intake of foods high in energy and fat and lack of physical exercise and sedentary lifestyle. Such chronic diseases are the main cause of death in the region, and thus any program to prevent and control these diseases should start with children and adolescent (Musaiger, 1998).

A healthful diet is one of the best methods to prevent many of the most prevalent chronic diseases including heart disease, stroke, diabetes mellitus, and some cancers in the United Arab Emirates according to Dr. A. M. Yusufali (2002), Consultant Physician-Cardiologist at Dubai Hospital. Additional recommendations by the Emirates Cardiology Society (2002) to prevent many of the complications of heart disease include making changes to diet and other lifestyle behaviors.

As well, in the new health paradigm, the meaning of health has extended beyond measures of morbidity and mortality to include wellness and quality of life. Comprehensive health-related quality of life (HRQL) assessments go beyond traditional biological indicators to include measures of physical and mental health status, social role-functioning, and general health perceptions.

Health-related quality of life on the individual level includes physical and mental health perceptions, including health risks and conditions, functional status, social support, and socioeconomic status. On the community level, self-assessed health status measures are useful tools for describing a population's health. Such information can be useful for area-wide health planning activities that must anticipate the need for specific services or facilities and can serve as a benchmark to judge the results of health planning efforts. In addition, information about the health of populations can be used in making decisions about how to allocate health resources among programs, areas, and regions.

At Zayed University the academic model promotes and supports students' achievement for quality of life and lifelong success. Health is an important domain of overall quality of life and it is proposed that a holistic health/nutrition education infrastructure be developed and incorporated at both campuses and in the community. A

health related quality of life perspective that incorporates aspects of culture, values and spirituality is needed at this stage of university development.

Health related quality of life includes domains of life that addresses physical, emotional, spiritual, and mental health needs. The long-term implications of health-related quality of life programs can impact individual lives and the lives and well-being of children and families and communities.

Program models that are most successful include facilitating lifestyle changes through a combination of efforts to enhance awareness, change behavior and create environments that support good health practices. According to O'Donnell (1989) program models that offer supportive environments will probably have the greatest impact in producing lasting change. Comprehensive programs have been shown to improve health practices, reduce medical and disability costs, and increase productivity. Also as part of a comprehensive health promotion campaign, nutrition programs can help in achieving the following benefits: improved morale and satisfaction, decreased absenteeism, and increased productivity (American Dietetics Association , 1999).

Today there is general consensus that health-related quality of life is the most relevant and comprehensive outcome measure for program evaluation and resource allocation (McKenzie & Smeltzer, 1997). Quality of life assessment provides a conceptual framework for addressing health promotion goals.

Examining student and community health and its nutritional determinants within a health related quality of life perspective achieves various aims. First, since quality of life approaches usually consider a broad range of determinants, including both individual and societal aspects, a quality of life approach should help identify determinants of community health, which may not have been considered to date.

Second, a quality of life perspective draws attention to determinants of health at a range of levels, specifically, personal factors such as attitudes and beliefs, community factors such as family, peers, employment, and schools, and structural factors such as income distribution, and educational and employment opportunities. Finally, a quality of life-perspective promotes positive health and healthy behaviors among students.

Nutrition Education and Well-being Project

The purpose of this program effort is to profile the physical and mental health status of Zayed University students and to determine if significant relationships exist between respondent characteristics, levels of nutritional knowledge, sources of nutritional knowledge, and personal health practices, lifestyle and other health conditions, and their physical and mental health status. Once these characteristics have been determined, a second purpose is to develop educational programs addressing nutrition and well-being associated with nutrition issues, and promote health activities.

The Nutrition Education and Well-being Project is an effort to establish a long term infrastructure to serve the ZU community and the nation with accurate, culturally relevant nutrition and well-being educational information. The project is designed to be unfolded in components, first piloted on the Dubai campus, replicated on the Abu Dhabi campus, and then established in the community, specifically in hospital clinics, social service organizations, and local schools.

Another program service will be web-based nutritional education made available to schools, clinics, and social service agencies in the nation and providing nutrition and

well-being educational web-casts to service providers in health, education and social services.

The Nutrition Education and Well-being Project is organized into two major efforts. The first effort involves specially selected nutrition student input into development of a nutrition educational program. The nutrition educational program consists of presentations about nutrition issues and small group educational seminars and individual nutrition counseling.

The timeline for this first effort is as follows:

Fall Semester, 2002

- Recruit selected nutrition and outstanding students from the 5 other colleges to form an advisory group to develop items for an interest survey.
- The interest survey will be administered to all Dubai campus Zayed University students. The survey will elicit student perceptions of needs for nutrition programs and counseling. Analysis of the survey will guide specific activities, seminar presentations, as well as determine the perceived need for small group nutrition educational seminars and individual nutrition counseling.
- Selected nutrition classes and nutrition students create posters and flyers advertising for the nutrition project, creating anticipation for the project.
- Launch the *NEW*

Spring semester, 2003

- Continue with selected nutrition students and students from the other 5 colleges to develop presentations, activities, small group educational seminars, and individual counseling.
- Selected nutrition students create and maintain a nutritional exhibit in the cafeteria, rotating the exhibits on a monthly basis. (Food Guide Pyramid, BMI calculations, etc.)

Fall semester, 2003

- Replicate Project in Abu Dhabi. Nutrition professors in Abu Dhabi ZU campus will be contacted and by-in to the project will be solicited. The procedure will be as identical as possible, with professors selecting nutrition students and students from the other 5 college to act as an advisory committee. An interest survey will be conducted during the fall semester, brochures and posters will be created to stimulate interest in the program.

Spring semester, 2004

- Launch *NEW* in Abu Dhabi ZU campus
- During Spring 2004 the Dubai Ministry of Health will be contacted and the program will be discussed with the intent to reproduce ZU activities within Dubai

Fall semester, 2004

- Replicate Project in Dubai communities
- During the Fall semester the Abu Dhabi Ministry of Health will be contacted with the intent to reproduce ZU *NEW* activities in Abu Dhabi community

Spring 2005

Launch the web site that can be accessed from communities within the UAE. This is organized in the following manner:

- Set up Information Portal through IT working with the e-innovation center
- Upload selected nutrition and well-being presentations to the website. As selected nutrition students develop nutrition and well-being presentations as part of the Project the most culturally relevant and accurate presentations will be uploaded to an internet website created for this purpose.

National schools, clinics, and social services access web site

- When a database of presentations has been well developed, schools, health clinics, social services, and food services will be notified of the existence of the web site and encouraged to use the site as a reference for accurate, culturally appropriate, and timely nutrition and well-being information for use in classrooms, staff training and client education.

Web casts (conference on web. Participants will need either a PC or web conferencing equipment)

- As a service to national schools, social services, food services, and health clinics, Zayed University College of Family Sciences web casts will be developed to offer nutrition and well-being educational seminars.