

Employing Behavioural and Educational Methodologies in Survey-Type Physician Needs Assessments

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ABSTRACT:

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Methodologies derived in psychological and adult educational research are uniquely suited to better understand the perceptions, skills, attitudes, and clinical practices of physicians. This research study incorporated quantitative assessment, and pattern and gap analysis (Tashakkorri and Teddlie, 1998) to investigate the assessment, diagnosis, treatment and management of the nutritional needs of patients with type 2 diabetes among Canadian family physicians.

Surveys were distributed to practicing family physicians across Canada, and data was collected over a six-week period, yielding a sample of 46 participants representative of Canadian family physicians. Physicians were asked about their clinical position regarding nutritional counselling of patients with type 2 diabetes, their motivation to invest in the nutritional care of these patients, what actions they take, and to identify their learning and practice needs in this therapeutic area.

The results indicated the following issues as primary themes of essential importance to Canadian physicians in the diagnosis and treatment of the nutritional needs of patients with type 2 diabetes: (a) inconsistent screening and assessment practices; (b) limited overall knowledge of treatment options to address nutritional deficiencies; (c) significant gaps in the management skills reported by physicians; and (d) a strong desire among physicians to increase their knowledge.

Based upon these results, strategies and solutions are needed to support Canadian family physicians in the nutritional care of patients with type 2 diabetes. A critical outcome of this needs assessment is the design of an educational program to impact physician knowledge, confidence and clinical decision-making skills. The methodology employed in this survey-type needs assessment has proven to be a benefit beyond the scope of traditional surveys by capturing behavioural and attitudinal aspects of physician practice.

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OBJECTIVES:

- Identify attitudes, beliefs, knowledge and clinical practice behaviours of family physicians in the nutritional care of patients with type 2 diabetes
- Assess gaps in their knowledge in this therapeutic area
- Identify learning and practice needs
- Prioritize proposed topics and issues

DEMOGRAPHICS:

Family Physicians n=46

The respondents were primarily male, and primarily practicing in community-based, urban clinics. All ten provinces were represented.

METHODOLOGY:

This research study incorporated quantitative assessment, and pattern and gap analysis (Tashakkorri and Teddlie, 1998). Surveys were distributed to practicing family physicians across Canada, and data was collected over a six-week period, yielding a sample of 46 participants representative of Canadian family physicians in the practice of type 2 diabetes treatment and management.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

The evidence indicates there are many opportunities for educational intervention with family physicians in the nutritional care of their patients with type 2 diabetes. Erratic and inconsistent screening and assessment, poor knowledge of treatment options and lack of confidence in their management skills underline the current status of nutritional care of patients with type 2 diabetes by family physicians. Drawing from these results, there are opportunities to provide real educational solutions for Canadian family physicians in the nutritional care of patients with type 2 diabetes.

FINDINGS:

Physicians' Attitudes:

- More than 70% stated that they could do more in the nutritional care of their patients with type 2 diabetes
- 70% are actively seeking information on the screening, diagnosis and treatment of the nutritional needs of patients with type 2 diabetes
- Two-thirds are looking for more information on the management of the condition

Referral Issues:

In spite of reporting a high tendency to refer their patients, over half of the physicians acknowledged that they do not refer their patients for an assortment of reasons, specifically because of perceived adherence issues.

Top reasons for non-referral	%
Patient adherence/compliance	52
Availability of resources	39
Adequacy of reimbursement	3
Previous poor results	3
Other	3

Screening & Diagnosis:

Issue	Current	Desired	Gap
Nutritional needs of children with type 2 diabetes (<12 years)	1.84	4.02	2.18
Nutritional needs of patients with type 2 diabetes with comorbid conditions	2.67	4.62	1.95
Assessing nutritional needs of patients with type 2 diabetes	2.76	4.59	1.83
Nutritional needs of elderly patients with type 2 diabetes (>65 years)	2.7	4.52	1.82
Nutritional needs of patients with type 2 diabetes who are pregnant	2.24	4.02	1.78

Indicates significant gaps

Family physicians acknowledge gaps in their knowledge of the following recommended targets:

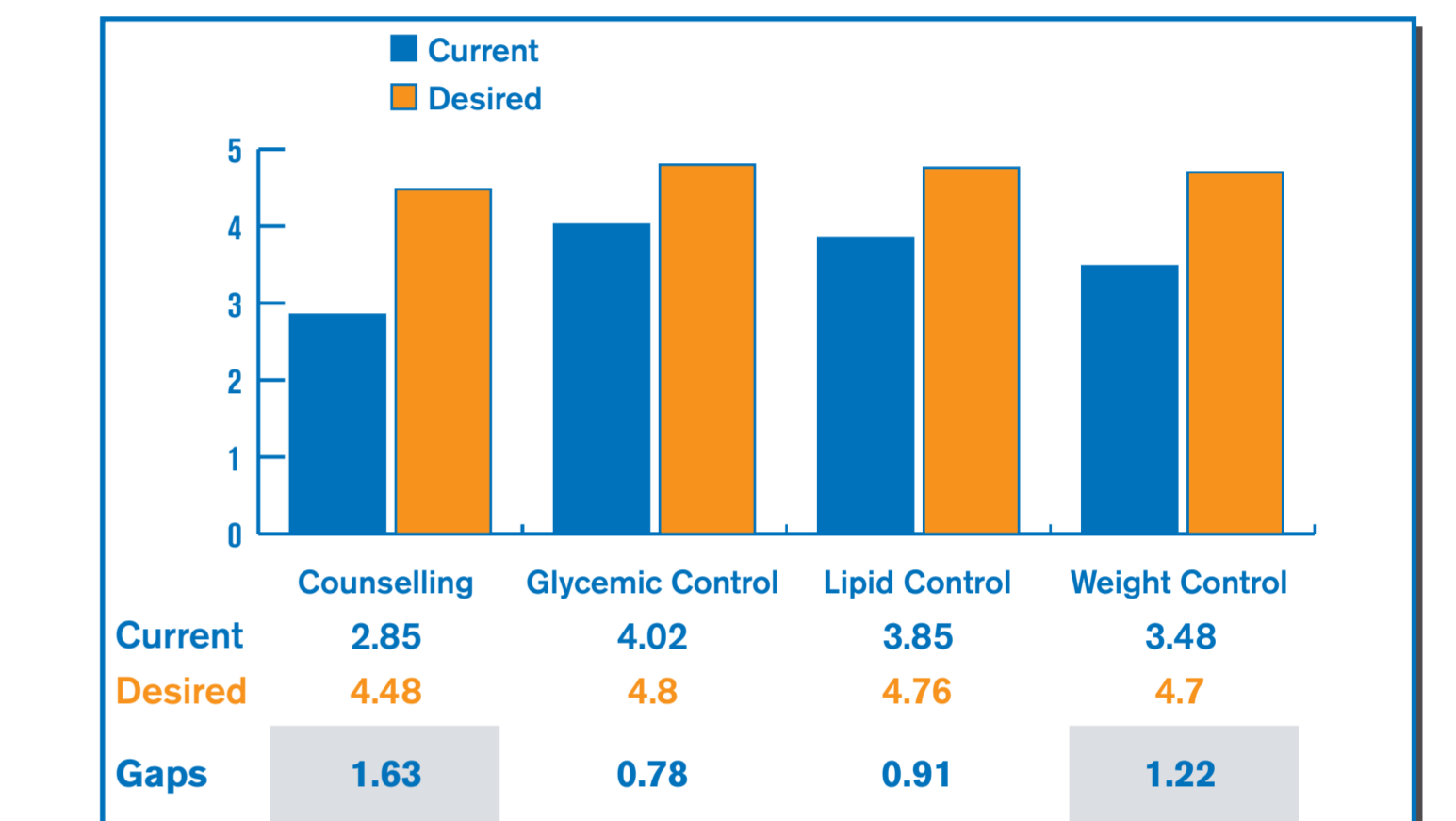
- Targets for monounsaturated fats
- Protein targets
- Targets for polyunsaturated fats
- Targets for total fats
- Targets for saturated fats
- Cholesterol targets

Family physicians:

- Identify many gaps in their abilities to screen and diagnose type 2 diabetes
- Struggle with recognizing the nutritional status of patients with type 2 diabetes
- Report statistically significant gaps in all areas of assessment
- Tend to focus on the patients' weight in their evaluation of diet adequacy.

Management Issues:

Family physicians acknowledge significant gaps in their current knowledge of counselling patients and weight control for patients with type 2 diabetes.



Indicates significant gaps

Treatment:

Physicians "frequently" treat nutritional deficiencies in their type 2 diabetic patients by:

- Treating to decrease weight
- Treating to increase activity

However:

Physicians "rarely" treat nutritional deficiencies by:

- Prescribing specialty diabetic products
- Prescribing weight loss products

The CME should be designed for the following outcomes:

- Enhance knowledge about assessment of nutritional needs of patients with type 2 diabetes
- Improve knowledge and skills in basic nutritional counselling and follow-up
- Develop strategies and tools for practical interventions regarding weight control for patients with type 2 diabetes