

Nurses, Key in Promoting Health-Oriented Lifestyles

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Interduction

Today, society at large is extremely interested in the role diet plays as a means to good health. This is due, without a doubt, to people's legitimate desire to enjoy a long and healthy life. At the same time, we have a vast array of food and drinks available today, though not always high in nutritional value. Coupled with the latter, we have also seen a notable increase in advertising and recommendations based on myths and irrational beliefs, all in stark contrast to evidence-based knowledge.

The nursing profession's most salient role is taking care of patients' health. It is our essence and reason for being, and, we support people, families and our communities through the care we provide. In this sense, nursing, as part of the public healthcare system, [1] "manages, assesses and provides nursing services aimed at promoting, maintaining and recuperating health, as well as preventing diseases and disabilities."

Similarly, diet represents a basic type of care for nurses as well as a universal prerequisite to maintain our health and quality of life. This explains why nurses are in charge of nutrition during all the stages of their patients' care [2].

The primary care area holds a privileged position from which to address health-related prevention and promotion among the general population [3]. The Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion [4] defined this role as "enabling people to increase control over and to improve their health." In healthcare systems based on primary care, the nurse's office is the means to access that health system, and the integrated and integrating prevention and promotion-related activities nurses carry out for people, families and their communities represent the first level of care, in general, while nutritional care, in particular, is aimed at improving the

population's dietary and physical exercise habits [5].

Today, no one doubts that a "healthy diet" and "eating right" are important and that diet has both a positive and negative effect on health and the quality of life, as well as representing a decisive factor in the population's general state of health and in the prevention of non-communicable diseases (NCDs). According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), the incidence of chronic diseases is growing exponentially around the world and represents the main cause of death [6]. Among all the factors that contribute to these diseases, more than half are related to diet. And, more importantly, regulating diet not only influences people's health in the present but can determine whether individuals suffer or not from illnesses such as cancer, cardiovascular problems and/or diabetes later on in life. However, despite the population's awareness of this issue, people pay increasingly less attention to their diet.

The ability to choose a balanced diet is something that has to be learned, especially today when people are bombarded with numerous dietary recommendations which are, at times, contradictory and unclear. However, institutional educational and awareness-raising campaigns are not enough to promote nutritional education among the population. We know that information is not enough to change people's behaviour [7]: knowing what should be done doesn't mean doing it.

Modifying behaviours to adapt healthy habits requires, on the one hand, interiorising what we learn and, on the other, being motivated to want to change our behaviours [8]. Educational programmes have to address each person's individual situation and their social, cultural and environmental traits [9] in order to inform and provide them with the necessary motivational tools to acquire the appropriate skills and more easily adopt the attitudes that transform their very behaviours [10,11].

Without doubt, nurses, as leaders in nutritional care, are able to

design dietary care plans focused on training/educating people and fomenting their self-care. This is due, in particular, to nurses' proximity and their ability to address patients'/families' nutritional problems [12].

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