Health Professionals’ Motivators and Barriers to Food Safety Education

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Introduction: Consumers trust health professional (nurses, or dietitians) for accurate food safety information; however, few health professionals provide food safety education to high-risk consumers, and less than ten percent use structured classes.

Purpose: The objective of the study is to investigate motivators and barriers of food safety education to health professionals and explore preferred delivery formats and topics.

Method: Phase 1: Structured focus groups (n=27) were conducted after training sessions with health professionals (mainly Registered Dietitian and Registered Nurse), from hospitals and public health agencies in Northern California. Each session was 1.5 to 2 hours. The focus group included questions about the barriers and motivators for health professionals to deliver food safety education to their clientele. Phase 2: Web-based surveys conducted among health professionals (n=188) across the United States. Participants were recruited from local hospitals and Fight BAC health professional mail list.

Results: In Phase 1, participants agreed there was a need to enhance food safety education for the high-risk patients. They wanted to include safe handling within existing food and nutrition educational programs. The three major barriers identified were “lack of management approval,” “patients not interested” and “not enough time and resources.” In Phase 2, quantitative data showed a different pattern, with 40% identifying “patients not interested”, 37% “not enough time” and 27% “not enough materials,” but only 4% “lack of management approval.” The most preferred information delivery format was brochures or pamphlets with a verbal explanation (48%). The most needed educational topic was “choose lower risk food” (31%). Most (82%) thought it was their role to provide food safety education to high-risk populations.

Significance: Health professionals are motivated to deliver food safety information to their clientele. However, they also need management level support by providing dedicated food safety time and validated educational materials that address their needs.