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Building capacity for nutrition at all life stages and system levels: a national review of existing Nutrition and Dietetics programs curricula in Ghana

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Ghana, like many low-middle-income countries, is affected by high undernutrition rates and increasing rates of overnutrition and their related morbidity and mortality consequences across all life stages. To address these challenges, critical skills and competence are needed including nutrition and dietetics education and training the professionals. Additionally, dietetics and nutrition practice has evolved in recent years requiring skills to address clinical and community-based interventions. The objective was to conduct a national assessment of nutrition and dietetics training curricula to identify training gaps.

This cross-sectional study involved two pathways for data collection. Virtual interviews with stakeholders and department heads were used to identify core-training components, perceived curricula gaps, and training resource needs. Interviews were recorded and transcribed. We compared existing curricula with a researcher-developed curriculum guideline representing a synergy of the core nutrition training developed for West Africa and other countries. Dedoose software was used for deductive coding of responses into parent and child codes to identify strengths and gaps in training bachelors, master and PhD levels of study.

Overall, four in-depth interviews with four department heads from three of the five major public universities were conducted. Nutrition and dietetics programs across the bachelors, master, and PhD levels include core basic sciences, applied nutrition and dietetics courses and practical components. Wide variations in nutrition and dietetics even though professionals sometimes are expected to perform the same tasks because of fewer numbers of trained professionals. Specific courses on global nutrition and health, and technological applications in nutrition and health were limited in nutrition curricula at levels of study. In few instances, these topics were merely merged into other topics. Most heads of departments expressed to need for courses on business and entrepreneurship. Stakeholders in dietetics and nutrition employment and professional advancements reported inadequate formal engagement of academic institutions to ensure need-based training. Employers reported observed wide variation in training evident in professionals who were more theory-based or practice-oriented rather than a balance of the two. Stakeholders in curricula monitoring alluded to limited human resources for consisted curriculum monitoring and engagement of programs.

Variations exists between the nutrition and dietetics training, potentially affecting consistency and quality of care. Global nutrition and technological applications in nutrition and health were limited in the curricula. To bridge these potential knowledge gaps or misalignment of care, we recommend harmonisation and routine review of the nutrition and dietetics curricula. Incorporating technology and global nutrition issues as stand-alone courses may help students prepare to meet evolving national and global trends and standards, as well as become globally competitive professionals. Further engagement is necessary for continued stakeholder discussions, harmonisation, and improvement.

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References

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