

Developing an Intervention Program to Promote Healthy Eating in a Catering System Based on Qualitative Research Results

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Abstract : Meals provided at catering systems are a common source of workers' nutrition and were found as contributing high amounts calories and fat. Thus, eating daily catering food can lead to overweight and chronic diseases. On the other hand, the institutional dining room may be an ideal environment for implementation of intervention programs that promote healthy eating. This may improve diners' lifestyle and reduce their prevalence of overweight, obesity and chronic diseases. The significance of this study is in developing an intervention program based on the diners' dietary habits, preferences and their attitudes towards various intervention programs. In addition, a successful catering-based intervention program may have a significant effect simultaneously on a large group of diners, leading to improved nutrition, healthier lifestyle, and disease-prevention on a large scale. In order to develop the intervention program, we conducted a qualitative study. We interviewed 13 diners who eat regularly at catering systems, using a semi-structured interview. The interviews were recorded, transcribed and then analyzed by the thematic method, which identifies, analyzes and reports themes within the data. The interviews revealed several major themes, including expectation of diners to be provided with healthy food choices; their request for nutrition-expert involvement in planning the meals; the diners' feel that there is a conflict between sensory attractiveness of the food and its' nutritional quality. In the context of the catering-based intervention programs, the diners prefer scientific and clear messages focusing on labeling healthy dishes only, as opposed to the labeling of unhealthy dishes; they were interested in a nutritional education program to accompany the intervention program. Based on these findings, we have developed an intervention program that includes: changes in food served such as replacing several menu items and nutritional improvement of some of the recipes; as well as, environmental changes such as changing the location of some food items presented on the buffet, placing positive nutritional labels on healthy dishes and an ongoing healthy nutrition campaign, all accompanied by a nutrition education program. The intervention program is currently being tested for its impact on health outcomes and its cost-effectiveness.

Keywords : catering system, food services, intervention, nutrition policy, public health, qualitative research

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