“Food for Thought” for Student-Athletes: An Online Education Program Aimed to Fuel Student-Athletes with Sports Nutrition and Mental Health Knowledge and Resources

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Objectives

• Improve the overall well-being of student-athletes through providing information regarding:
  • nutrition,
  • sleep habits,
  • anxiety,
  • depression,
  • eating disorders, and
  • life after college.

• Aligned with NCAA’s Mental Health Best Practices
Program Design

- Researchers implemented a self-paced online nutrition and mental wellness education program. Delivered via app.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Overview of Module Topics: Food for Thought for Student-Athletes</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>Week 1</td>
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Program Design

• The app was created with a platform made for dietitians (Healthie)
  • Could host educational content in the described program.
  • Offered a method for dietary surveillance, telehealth appointments with the dietitian, and some additional features that give a well-rounded package to sports nutrition initiatives.
Program Design

• Participants:
  • Division I varsity student-athletes
  • 74 participants (21 male, 53 female); 50% completed all educational modules
  • Incentivized with “snack stipends”

• Assessment:
  • Knowledge; sleep index; food insecurity; anxiety; depression; eating disorders
  • Qualitative interviews
Key Findings

• Quantitative:
  • 79 individuals participated including 73 student-athletes (SAs) and 6 coaches and staff.
  • 10 SAs completed both the pre/post knowledge assessment.
  • Results indicated a significant p-value =0.004 for pre/post knowledge of the SNKI instrument items. When non validated instrument items were included in analysis, no significant results were noted (p=.080).
## Key Findings

- **Quantitative**

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<tr>
<th>Screening Method</th>
<th>Participants Screened</th>
<th>Notes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mental Health (anxiety/depression)</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>14% reported high anxiety or depression (According to PHQ-9 and GAD-7)</td>
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<tr>
<td>ASBQ Sleep Screening</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>28% reported poor sleep behavior (according to ASBQ)</td>
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<tr>
<td>FAST Eating Disorder Screening</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>14% reported subclinical eating disorder (according to FAST)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Food Insecurity Screening</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>30% reported low food security (according to USDA 6-item)</td>
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Key Findings

• Qualitative
  • Three participants completed the qualitative interview: two student-athletes and one administrator within the athletic department.
  • Six categories were identified in the transcripts.
    • General Assessment of (A) Content and (B) Accessibility, Holistic Content, Suggestions for Improvement, Reaching out to the RDN, Changing Habits, and Increasing Participation.
Implementation at Other Universities

• Data suggest:
  • Students tend to prefer and perform better with in-person interactions and experiential learning opportunities.
  • Comments regarding the program content, accessibility, and delivery were positive.
  • Participants appreciated the holistic content, and ability to access additional reputable resources on a topic.
  • Survey participation might have been achieved if the surveys were housed within the app and available within the lessons.
Implementation

- Other institutions can use these materials to assess and screen their student-athletes and deliver a virtual nutrition and mental health education course.
- Sports medicine, strength coaches, and dietitians are likely most suited to construct and deliver such a program to their athletics program.
- The app was created with a platform made for dietitians (Healthie)
  - allowed the researchers to release a portion of each module each day, which most participants appreciated.
Implementation

• In order to increase participation, participants suggested a competition between various teams, coach encouragement, and an overview of the program from the registered dietitian/nutritionist, or others who deliver the program on campus.
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