

Family Living Programs

Current Concepts in Nutrition and Aging Conference

Situation

As the U.S. population ages, high quality health care and educational programs are increasingly important to address the needs of older adults. Professionals who work with home health care agencies, community meal programs, and other types of care centers need current and reliable information on nutritional needs, educational resources, and dietary interventions for older adults.

Response

The annual "Current Concepts in Nutrition and Aging" conference is targeted at dietitians, nutrition program directors, nutrition educators, social workers, and other professionals who work with older adults. The program is designed to provide information and skills that care providers can use in everyday practice. About 650 dietitians and community nutrition professionals attended the annual conferences at the UW-Madison/Extension Pyle Center on September 10, 1999, September 8, 2000, September 23, 2001, and September 6, 2002. These conferences are co-sponsored by UW-Extension Family Living Programs, the UW-Madison Department of Nutritional Sciences, the Wisconsin DHFS Bureau on Aging and Long Term Care Resources, The Wisconsin Nutrition Education Network, and the UW-Madison Institute on Aging.

Participants attend keynote presentations with updates on issues of common interest, followed by a series of smaller breakout sessions in which participants meet with researchers and fellow practitioners to discuss new findings and educational strategies on more specific topics, such as eye disease, depression, arthritis, osteoporosis, menopause, herbal remedies, internet resources, Alzheimer's disease, heart disease, physical activity, caloric restriction, and diabetes.

Outcomes

Of the 400 participants who completed program evaluations in the past three years, 95% indicated they learned information that they plan to use. The conferences were given overall ratings of 4.4 to 4.5 on a 5 point scale, with 5 being "excellent."

Three months after the 1999 program, 21 participants were contacted for follow up about how they had used the information from the conference. Responses fell into three categories. Participants said they had:

- Incorporated the information into printed materials, such as newsletters or handouts;
- Directly discussed the information with their clients and clients' families through counseling or education.
- Many added that the information was interesting and relevant either personally or to their family members.

- Eighty-four percent of respondents felt the conference included more than the average amount of information they could apply in their work with older adults, compared to other conferences they have attended in the past few years (avg. score 4.2 out of 5 where 5 equals much more than average).
- All of the respondents (100%) were satisfied with the amount of information they could apply (avg. score 4.8 out of 5).

Personal Comments:

Here are what some participants had to say about the conferences:

"This is the third one I've attended, and each one gets consistently better."

"I always come away with at least five or six very practical things I can use."

"If I could only go to one conference per year, I'd pick this one."

"This gives me a yen to look up more information on facets that I didn't realize before."

"Plenty to share with coworkers."

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