Practices of dietetic educators in the United States: Implications for competency development pathways and workforce preparation

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This study explores the experiences and practices of American dietetic educators regarding student’s competency development using a temporal sequence of dietetic competency as a framework for investigation. Aspects of this competency development continuum including student selection, the university environment, pedagogy and the American internship program are examined. Data collection involves a qualitative study using semi-structured interviews with 18 dietetic educators from 14 American universities. The interviews were audiotaped, transcribed, reviewed, coded and categorised to identify common themes, consistent with the constant comparison method. This study demonstrated that the majority of respondents had a poor knowledge of their professional associations competency standards and how they relate to and inform dietetic education. Competency development was viewed as a collective process dependent on a combination of didactic and practical learning experiences. Computer technologies were reportedly used widely for on-campus and distance learning and there was broad agreement that on-line learning produced results equivalent to didactic teaching. American dietetic educators reported to commonly utilise various extra-curricular learning activities including seminar attendance, association with special interest groups, extensive community interaction through public health projects and involvement in State professional development programs. American dietetic educators consulted considered student support networks (such as learning groups and academic mentors) as are important to academic success.

This research provides qualitative data to inform the analysis of the temporal sequence of competency development from the perspective of dietetic educators in the United States, which can be used to help assess the competency development processes underpinning effective dietetic workforce preparation.