Do Physicians Perceive the Roles of Nutritionists and Registered Dietitian Nutritionists as Different?



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Introduction

Many dietitians are still divided on whether they find the use of Registered Dietitian (RD) or Registered Dietitian Nutritionist (RDN) as more appropriate. The ambiguity between the terms, dietitian and nutritionist, leave many individuals unable to discern between the two. The opportunity for dietitians to treat greater quantities of patients is influenced by physicians' understanding of dietitians' roles, as well as the public's understanding of services they provide.

Purpose

To determine how the terms dietitian and nutritionist are understood and referred to in the healthcare setting by physicians and whether modification of the title RD to RDN better communicates their role and services to healthcare professionals and the public.

Methods

- O Approximately 4,100 emails were sent to LLU alumni physicians through Loma Linda University Health, Office of Advancement.
- O Inclusion Criteria:
- Loma Linda University Alumni physicians
- Practicing within the United States of America
- Email maintained by Loma Linda University Health, Office of Advancement
- At least 21 years of age
- O Quantitative data was obtained through a 10-minute anonymous questionnaire using Qualtrics online survey engine.
 - 183 physicians responded (Table 1: Demographic Characteristics)
 - Data analyzed using SPSS Statistics Software version 25.0
- O Qualitative data was obtained through the following free response question:
 - "In your own words, please express what you believe are the main differences between a Nutritionist and a Dietitian."
 - 156 physicians responded (Figure 1)
 - Qualitative themes were determined by manual identification of key terms and phrases which were divided into categories to illustrate several trends.

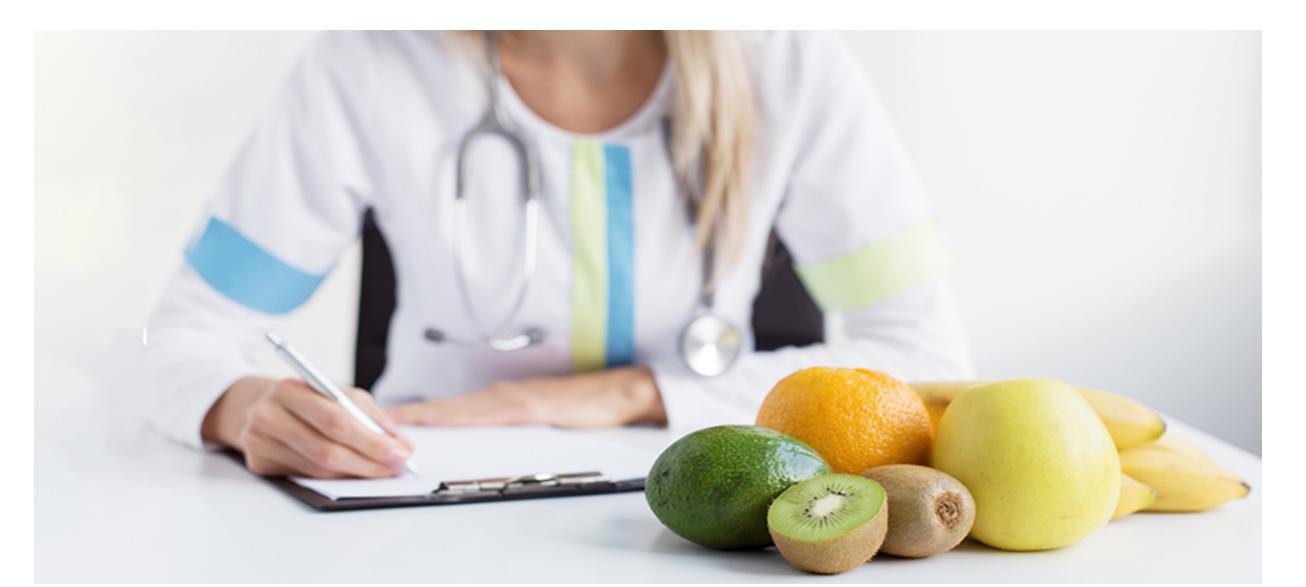


Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Survey Participants							
Characteristic		Ν	%	Characteristic	Ν	%	
Gender				Currently Practicing			
	Male	131	71.6	Yes	132	72.1	
	Female	52	28.4	No	51	27.9	
Age (years)	e (years) Duration of Practice (years)						
0 () /	21-30	5	2.7	1-5	25	13.7	
	31-40	30	16.4	6-10	18	9.8	
	41-50	22	12.0	11-20	19	10.4	
	51-60	28	15.3	21-40	81	44.3	
	61-70	40	21.9	40+	40	21.9	
	71-80	29	15.8	State of Practice			
	81+	29	15.8	California	84	45.2	
				Not California	102	54.8	
Experience				Type of Practice			
	Resident	18	9.8	Private	53	29.0	
	Fellowship	5	2.7	Group	53	29.0	
	Attending	160	87.4	Hospital	72	40.4	

Quantitative Results

- Not currently practicing was associated with more confidence in knowing there is a difference between dietitians and nutritionists (p = 0.007).
- Duration of practice greater than 21 years was associated with more confidence in knowing there is a difference between dietitians and nutritionists (p = 0.003).
- Ages 50 years and younger were more likely to utilize the terms dietitian and nutritionist interchangeably (p = 0.029).
- Residents were more likely to use the terms dietitian and nutritionist interchangeably than Attendings (p = 0.007).
- A longer duration of practice was associated with reduced use of the terms dietitian and nutritionist interchangeably (p = 0.03).
- Overall knowledge scores were conducted for participants by computing correct answers for each question provided.
 - \circ Results found females (p = 0.034) and those practicing 16 years or longer (p = 0.002) obtained the highest scores reflecting knowledge of differentiation between Nutritionists and Dietitians.

Table 2. Frequency and Significance of Selected Demographics and the terms **Dietitian and Nutritionist**

Aware of the difference between the	e term dietitian a	nd nutritionist				
	%	P-value				
Not currently practicing	71	0.007				
Currently practicing	44					
≥ 21 years of practice	61	0.003				
< 21 years of practice	36					
Do NOT use the term dietitian and nutritionist interchangeably						
Age 51 and above	57	0.029				
Age 50 and below	32					
Attending	51	0.007				
Resident	39					
With more than 21 years of experience	63	0.03				
With less than 21 years of experience	43					

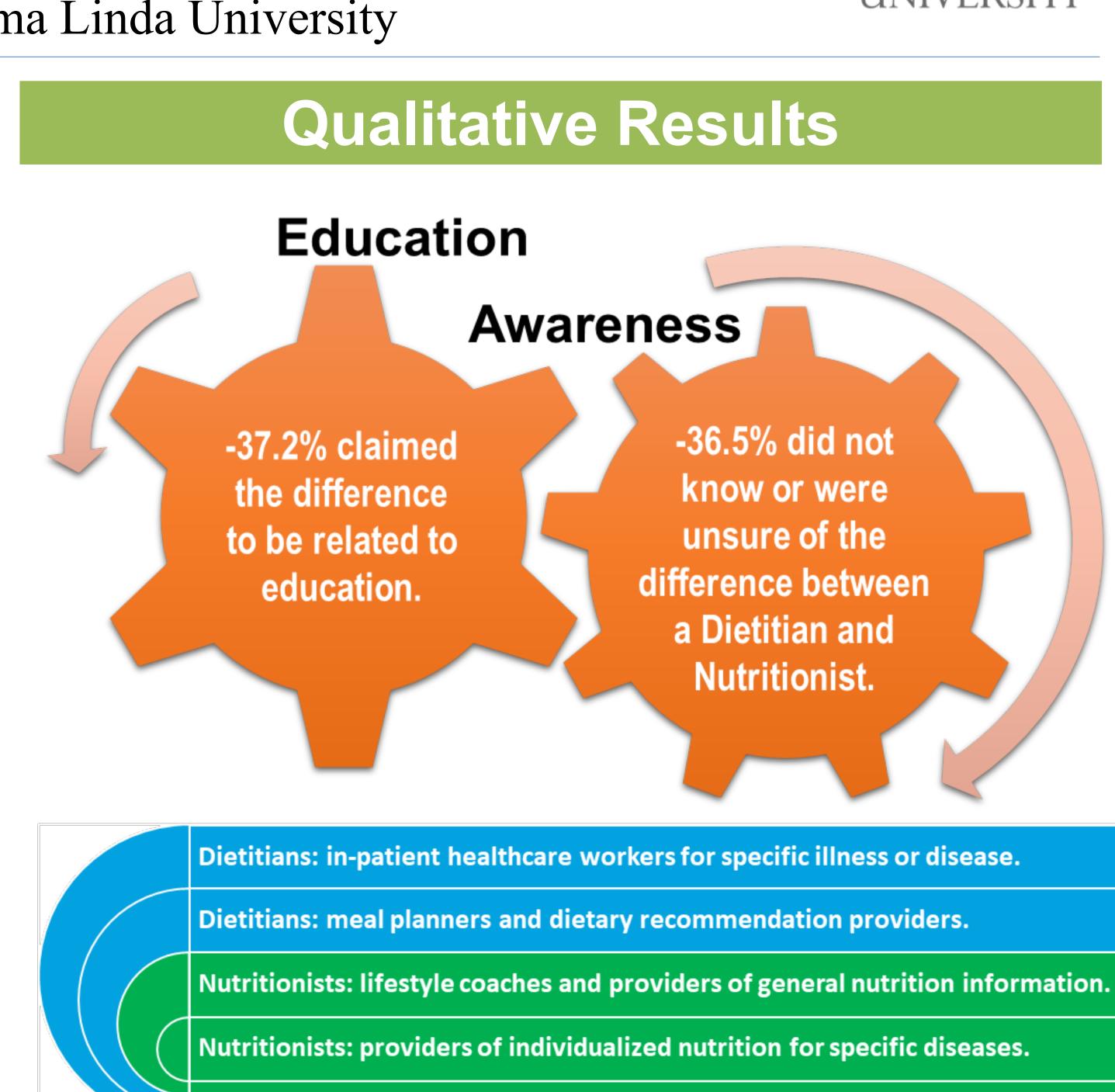


Figure 1. Emerging themes on the differences between Dietitians and Nutritionists by physicians (n=156)

- healthcare professionals and their patients.
- patients.

- comparisons.

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Conclusion

• Dietitians should aim to increase **awareness** of their services to

 Dietitians should strongly consider use of the credentials RDN to better **communicate** their roles to healthcare professionals and

• Further interdisciplinary education is necessary to clarify the roles of dietitians to healthcare professionals to increase quality patient care.

• Referral to a Registered Dietitian Nutritionist is necessary to ensure patients receive high-quality care from credentialed professionals.

 Future research should be conducted to identify any similarities or disparities between different physician populations and provide