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Joe is currently studying MSc Nutrition and Dietetics at the University of Chester, with a particular interest in gastroenterology, especially allergies. He is passionate about Paediatrics and hopes to work in an acute setting in London after completing his course.

'GUYATITIANS': WHY ARE MALES SO UNDER-REPRESENTED IN DIETETICS?

Higher education is dominated by females in the UK. According to UCAS, women were 35% more likely to go to university than men¹ and if this rate continues, girls born this year will be 75% more likely to attend than men.²



However, in the Dietetics profession this inequality is greatly amplified. Less than 4% of registered dietitians in the UK are male, this is approximately 280 out of more than 7,000 registered dietitians. The reasons for this are unclear and there is limited research that has addressed these issues. This is also not only an issue in the UK, as globally, men are very under-represented in the profession as a whole.³ A similar issue is seen in the nursing professions where only around 10% are male.⁶

In 2014, the BDA set out to address this issue with a press release entitled: Where are the Guyatitians (male dietitians)? The chairman of the BDA at the time, Sian O'Shea, stated that the first dietitians in the 1920s were specialist nurses who, at the time, would have all been female and this is possibly where the gender gap has developed. Dr Duane Mellor, a 'Guyatitian', stated that the lack of males could potentially prevent the development of the profession and said that it may also be beneficial to our patients to have a more balanced and representative workforce.³

A recent study sent questionnaires to all universities in the UK who offer undergraduate or post-graduate courses. The aim was to determine the views of current dietetics students about the under-representation of males in the profession. 11 out of 14 universities responded with 213 students, 21 of whom were male. 95% of males believed that increasing the number of men in the profession would enhance it as a whole compared to 72% of females. Interestingly, 81% of males discovered the profession at a later stage in life than females, the majority of whom (57%) discovered it earlier in secondary school or sixth form.⁴

The gender gap examined

A Canadian study in 2012 agreed with these findings and suggested that more research was needed in order to determine the barriers and facilitators to this.⁵ This suggests that perhaps the profession should be promoted earlier on in education and also it should be made clear that people from all backgrounds are welcome in the profession.

It is clear that male dietitians are very hard to come by, at least especially in clinical practice. The reasons for this are unclear and research is needed to determine why the gender gap in our profession is so vast. We should be actively promoting the profession to all young people and including young males too. The more diverse the workforce is, the more successful we can potentially be in treating our patients and preventing disease!

ABOUT ME

As a student dietitian myself, I am the only male out of 17 in my class. I have also never met a practising male dietitian and have only met three male RDs working in academia. On my most recent placement there were approximately 30 dietitians, all of whom were female.

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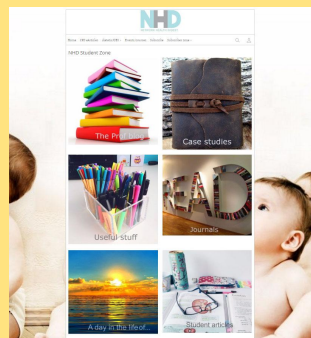
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