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Exploring the importance of 'sustainability principles' for dietetic practice and how to streamline these into the dietetic curriculum- a scoping review of the possibilities

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Pedagogic Research and Teaching Innovation (PRTI) Award

Final Report 2017

Name of key contact: Dr Clare Pettinger

Department: School of Health Professions

Names of other staff involved: Dr Wendy Miller (RA); Dr Harriet Dismore (initial RA); Rachel Horsfall (temp student support RA) and Elizabeth Atherton (previously Medact)

Title of project: 'Exploring the importance of 'sustainability principles' for dietetic practice and how to streamline these into the dietetic curriculum- a scoping review of the possibilities'

Type of project: Scoping review and pedagogic participatory workshop (final year dietetic students)

Keywords; sustainable eating; student dietitians; registered dietitians; sustainability in the curriculum

Aims of project: This small-scale scoping project aimed to explore how 'sustainability' is understood within the dietetic profession and curriculum, and how 'sustainability principles' can be better embedded.

Background/context to project: Understanding the many complexities of the human, social and ecological implications of climate change and their impact on the food system and food security is a real challenge for the dietetic profession. The evidence base for this emerging area needs, therefore, to be strengthened to ensure the profession is fully equipped with the competencies and skills required to embrace these wider ecological issues. This small scale exploratory project provides a starting point for developing more robust research into the future.

Methods used:

1. Scoping review (summer 2016) which included:
 - a. Straw poll of Dietitians in UK via LinkedIn
 - b. Literature review carried out by initially appointed RA
 - c. International Congress of Dietetics interactive workshop (which included a survey of n=48 international dietitians on their views on sustainability) – this was a complementary arm of funded study so will not be outlined here (but is included in draft publication)
2. A participatory student workshop with Level 6 dietetic students at Plymouth University was run in October 2016 to 'explore dietetic student views and ideas on the importance of sustainability

principles broadly and where they should fit within the curriculum'. This workshop consisted of four complementary strands: (i) delivery of key learning materials; (ii) interactive survey; (iii) group work activity; and (iv) plenary discussion. Analysis is ongoing and involves generation of basic categories and themes.

Results: The literature review demonstrated a rich yet diverse and complex background to contextualise and justify this topic area. Yet there was an obvious paucity of literature relating specifically to dietitians. There is, therefore, a clear gap to be filled in the literature, more work needs to be done around sustainability principles within curricula for allied health professions.

The interactive student workshop illustrated breadth and depth of perceptions around sustainability principles for student dietitians. There was a good level of understanding of 'sustainable eating' highlighting factors such as environmental impact, nutritional health and food security. Findings were described and themed under the following headings:

- a. Understanding and definitional aspects of 'sustainable eating' and dietitian's perceived role
- b. Means of engaging with the topic of 'sustainable eating' and its practical application in different workplace settings
- c. Modifying dietetic curricula to incorporate 'sustainability principles

There was evidence presented to show how student dietitians perceive their potential role as advisors and educators on sustainable eating and wider food system issues. These students feel that educational curricula could be modified and further aligned with issues of sustainability.

Associated publications: Currently in preparation (initial draft completed and comments received back from research team members – plan to submit to Journal of Human Nutrition and Dietetics by beg of Dec 2017 – chief editor has responded suggesting it is potentially of interest)
Title: *What does 'sustainable eating' mean for dietetic students and professionals? An exploratory study*

Dissemination:

- PedRIO employability conference January 2017 – poster presentation
- Webinar – international dietetic audience Feb 2017 (available for free via <https://educationinnutrition.com.au/presentations/view/sustainable-food-as-a-health-issue>)
- PedRIO conference April 2017 - oral presentation
- This research has led to me being invited (and accepting) to join a national working group of registered dietitians to refresh the British Dietetic Association policy statement on 'Sustainable Diets' - this paper is due to go to the executive council in Oct 2017
- Abstract accepted (with minor modifications due end Oct 2017) for British Dietetic Association annual research conference on 7th Dec 2017
- Invitation to be co-author for a chapter on 'sustainability/environment issues' in new Critical Dietetics and Nutrition Studies text book (eds John Coveney and Martin Caraher) due for publication August 2018