Improving Obesity Education through Policy: Continuing Education on Nutrition

Councilmembers proposed legislation to require that continuing education (CE) requirements for physicians, nurses, and physician assistants practicing in the District of Columbia include 2 credits of evidence-based instruction on nutrition. The legislation is expected to improve obesity prevention and treatment efforts by providing health professionals with the information and skills needed to incorporate nutrition counseling into clinical practice.

**Scenario**

Rates of diabetes, heart disease, and obesity-related cancers are projected to increase substantially in the District of Columbia by 2030. Although nutritional intervention is considered a cornerstone of obesity management, few health professionals report receiving adequate training on nutrition during their formative education and most providers do not pursue continuing education on nutrition of their own volition.

Many providers are unaware of how to assess nutritional status or unable to make appropriate referrals to community resources and health professionals as needed to address diet-related diseases like obesity. In communities like the District with high economic inequality, quality of care may be improved by additional training that ensures providers have a working knowledge of the barriers that families struggling with obesity face in their homes and neighborhood environments.

**Educational Objectives**

Provide information and skills to enable health professionals to incorporate nutrition counseling into clinical practice, which may include instruction on:

- obesity treatment and prevention;
- nutrition assessment;
- food insecurity and its impact on health;
- nutrition topics related to medical specialties; and/or
- the role of nutrition in disease prevention and management.
Heart disease, cancer, and stroke are leading causes of death in D.C. Nutrition should be a first-line prescription that doctors and nurses make to help turn around these epidemics.

— Susan Levin, MS, RD, Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine