



How Wayne State's Medical School Became the First in the U.S. to Require Plant-Based Nutrition Education

By Megan Edwards
October 27 2021

Wayne State University School of Medicine in Detroit is the first college in the United States to introduce a mandatory plant-based nutrition unit into their curriculum for first-year medical students. The four-week "Rooting for Wellness" learning module, launched in 2019, utilizes recorded lectures, online quizzes, cooking demonstrations, guest lecture panels, and a vegan community fair to teach students about the critical connection between nutrition and disease prevention. The curriculum's creators recently [published a report](#) in the *International Journal of Disease Reversal and Prevention* about the success of the program and how other universities can follow their lead.

"I've always been passionate about community advocacy, nutrition, and the promotion of preventive medicine, but was disappointed by how sparingly these topics were covered in med school," said Lakshman Mulpuri, a co-founder of Rooting for Wellness and student at the university. "I was in awe of the incredible stories of patients who had empowered themselves with a whole-food, plant-based diet. I knew that these stories and the science behind them needed to be shared with my fellow fledgling physicians."

Shaping the Future of Medicine

In the U.S, the majority of medical schools provide fewer than 25 hours of nutrition training and fewer than 20 percent require a nutrition course at all. Wayne State's Plant-Based Nutrition Group, a student organization of which Mulpuri is a member, set out to change that by hosting prominent lifestyle medicine doctors for on-campus events, which Mulpuri says got the attention of the administration.

"We used the momentum of those events to go to the administration and present our case for incorporating plant-based nutrition into our classes. It took a lot of convincing, but eventually they saw how it fell in line with our education around patient outcomes."

The curriculum was then developed over several months in tandem with university faculty, the Physician Committee of Responsible Medicine, the American College of Lifestyle Medicine, and VegFund to center the humanistic aspects of plant-based nutrition. Over the course of a month, all 300 first-year medical students participated.

A Prescription for Plants

Mulpuri and his co-founders gathered student feedback after the conclusion of the course and learned that their peers were most impacted by the live discussion panels featuring patients who had drastically improved their health by adopting a whole-food, plant-based diet.

"I think the students appreciated that we designed the curriculum to help make them a more holistic and informed physician instead of just preparing them to pass their next board exam," he said.

Additionally, Rooting for Wellness launched a 30-Day Plant-Based Kickstart program that showed medical students how to cook without animal products as a way to connect more deeply to the classroom lessons. Mulpuri says that he hopes the experiences will make a lasting impression.

"This foray into plant-based nutrition was designed to plant a seed that can grow over the course of [their] careers," he told Forks Over Knives. "Equipped with a more comprehensive understanding of plant-based nutrition, these future physicians will be better prepared to combat the devastating effects of chronic disease that millions of Americans face every year. It's

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incredibly rewarding to integrate the scientific foundation of plant-based nutrition into traditional medical curriculum so we can highlight the humanistic value of working with each patient's unique lifestyle and personal story.”