Mid-Ohio Food Collective + WW: A Feasibility Study of a Commercial Wellness Intervention for Food Pantry Recipients

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Objective: This study aims to evaluate the feasibility of offering a commercial wellness program for food insecure and overweight/obese patients by combining weekly produce access through Mid-Ohio Farmacy (MOF) with health education provided through WeightWatchers (WW).

Use of Theory or Research: Food insecurity is associated with poor diet quality and health outcomes. Studies have shown WW to be effective in delivering holistic wellness strategies for developing healthy habits and sustained weight loss. Poor access to and affordability of produce is an oft-cited barrier to achieving a healthy dietary pattern among individuals with low income.

Target Audience: Ninety MOF participants (≥18 years, BMI 27-50, inclusive) in central Ohio. All MOF participants have screened as food insecure by their healthcare provider.

Program Description: Participants receive a 12-month subscription to WW (smartphone application + coaching sessions) and a bag of cooking and weight-loss support tools. Participants continue to receive weekly access to produce at any one of 13 participating food pantries through their MOF membership.

Evaluation Methods: Feasibility was evaluated quantitatively and qualitatively via demographic analyses at the ZIP code level, recruitment and enrollment interviews with study-affiliated WW coaches, and incentivized focus groups with participants upon study conclusion at 24 weeks post-enrollment.

Results: Participants (n=72) were recruited from ZIP codes with 19% poverty rate or greater (state average = 13.6%). Recruitment via text or mail yielded the greatest response (47% and 21%, respectively). Barriers to enrollment include lack of transportation and work/healthcare obligations. Program strengths include improvements in participants’ perceived self-efficacy for healthy decision making and enhanced social support, although challenges with digital literacy may be hindering program engagement and impact.

Conclusion: This study demonstrates the feasibility of offering a commercial wellness intervention, including digital and interpersonal components, with healthcare and pantry-mediated produce access to populations experiencing food insecurity and overweight/obesity. Findings demonstrate the promise of such programming as well as the need for more intentional tailoring of the program for this population.

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Mixed-Methods Evaluation of Implementing a Statewide Online Self-Paced Nutrition Education Program for Low-Income Populations

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Background: Current literature lacks studies examining the implementation of self-paced, online nutrition education programs, including outcomes such as barriers and facilitators to program implementation and uptake. This study explored positive and negative influences on the implementation of the University of Georgia Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Education (UGA SNAP-Ed) eLearning nutrition education program, Food eTalk, in various community- and clinic-based settings in Georgia.

Objective: To identify facilitators and barriers of Food eTalk implementation in relation to program participant activity measures.

Study Design, Setting, Participants: Longitudinal, mixed-methods included in-depth interviews with program facilitators conducted virtually and monitoring program activity during implementation (1.5 ± 3.5 months) as well as pre- (4.4 ± 2.6 months) and post-implementation (6 ± 0 months). eLearning program implementation occurred independently. Interview participants (N=8, 100% female, 38% African American, 25% rurally based) represented community- and clinic-based organizations serving low-income audiences. eLearning participants (N=2,484) were SNAP-Ed-eligible adult Georgians (≥18 years).

Measurable Outcome/Analysis: Descriptive statistics and frequency measures summarized program usage data. Multi-coder abductive analysis included deductive coding of pre-defined constructs of the Consolidated Framework for Implementation Research (CFIR) and inductive methods to identify emerging themes.

Results: The self-paced nature of Food eTalk positively and negatively influenced implementation. Facilitators praised the program for being adaptable and compatible with their organizational goals and felt confident in the program’s longevity. Facilitators shared concerns over the effectiveness of their efforts to engage with potential Food eTalk participants to encourage program completion. Food eTalk registration typically increased during the implementation period, followed by a decrease during the post-implementation period. Registration counts surpassed program completion across all observed time periods. Elements of future program implementation should include goal setting, flexible and novel engagement strategies, and communicative efforts between administrative staff and facilitators.

Conclusion: Food eTalk implementation was determined to be feasible in all participating organizations and a sustainable programming option moving forward. Findings of this study can be used to inform implementation of self-paced, online nutrition education programs for low-income populations.

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