Background
Registered Dietitian Nutritionists (RDNs) often provide guidance on healthy eating, but they do not universally teach hands-on cooking and food preparation. A healthier dietary pattern has been associated with cooking at home.1,2 However, evidence suggests lack of skills, knowledge, and confidence impose barriers.3,4 RDNs have the potential to play a central role in teaching essential cooking skills and food-related knowledge.

Few studies have investigated the experiences of RDNs involved in teaching the public how to cook and prepare healthy food. An exploration of their perspectives can provide insights on the competencies needed for RDNs to effectively engage in culinary education, and inform the content addressed in training students as future nutrition educators.

This pilot study is part of a larger, ongoing investigation on the experiences of RDNs who teach nutrition through hands-on food preparation.

Objectives
To explore the perspectives of RDNs who teach cooking and food preparation to: (1) identify the knowledge/skills they believe are needed to teach the public how to prepare healthy food, and compare with RDN competencies outlined by the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics' Food and Culinary Professionals (FCP) Dietetic Practice Group; and (2) better understand their personal experiences learning to cook.

Methods
Research design: Cross-sectional and qualitative
Participants: RDNs (n=15) who teach cooking and food preparation through demonstrations, classes and/or one-on-one consultations
Recruitment: Convenience sample from community settings, including private practice/consulting, supermarkets, Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program and SNAP-Ed
Data Collection: Face-to-face semi-structured interviews conducted remotely via Microsoft Teams
Analysis: Interviews were recorded, transcripts were coded and recurring themes were summarized

Knowledge & Skills Perceived as Necessary to Teach Cooking & Food Preparation: Recurring Themes Addressing FCP Core Competencies

Basic Cooking Skills:
- Cooking equipment– selection & appropriate use
- Knife skills & safety
- Communicating cooking skills to non-cooks

Cooking Techniques:
- Basic food preparation
- Dry & moist heat cooking techniques
- Food safety– cooking foods to appropriate temperature
- Techniques to improve status of nutrients & food groups recognized by Dietary Guidelines for Americans

Emerging theme:
...I would help my mom cook dinner. And then I'd say it was probably around like 16 or so that I would actually try to like make a meal and actually like chop up things and get involved to the point of, you know, preparing something as opposed to just like helping out.

Personal Experiences Learning to Cook

Communicating About Food:
- Selection of audience-appropriate messages
- Ability to present basic food demonstrations & presentation
- Working with & through the media- traditional & social media
- Public speaking
- Communicating the enjoyment of food

Conclusions
- The skills and knowledge perceived by RDNs as most essential to effectively teach the public about food preparation reflected FCP competencies on basic cooking skills, cooking techniques and communicating about food.
- Cooking at home with family while growing up fostered interest and skills that inspired some RDNs to seek careers involved in culinary education.
- Our findings merit research with a larger sample to better understand the competencies and characteristics of RDNs involved in culinary education in diverse settings.

References

SNEB Nutrition Educator Competencies: 3.2, 10.1

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