



Behavior Change Counseling: Training Graduate Dietetic Students in Shortened Motivational Interviewing

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ABSTRACT

Objective: Motivational interviewing is a client centered approach that works to elicit behavior change from within. A shortened method, Behavior Change Counseling, is often used in lifestyle changes in the clinical setting.

Study Design: Graduate dietetic students were counselors as part of a fruit and vegetable intervention and were assessed for adherence to behavior change counseling. The counselors (n=5) were doctoral students in dietetics at West Virginia University and n=2 hold registered dietitian (RD) licensure. Counselors were female with average counseling experience of one year (0.8 ± 1.3), with two counselors having no previous counseling experience. Each counselor was assigned intervention participants to counsel based on schedule, with each counselor having at least one participant and no more than 10 participants. Counselors were first trained across two consecutive days on motivational interviewing techniques by a member of the Motivational Interviewing Network of Trainers (MINT). Training tactics included lecture, role play and teach backs. Following training, counselors completed the 8-week fruit and vegetable intervention where they met with subjects weekly. Counseling sessions were audio recorded with permission from subjects. To measure adherence and improvements in behavior change counseling, baseline (week 2) and post (week 8), audio tapes were randomly selected and coded using the Behavior Change Counselling Index (BECCI) by three independent raters. BECCI contains eleven, five-point Likert-scaled items that ranks counselor's motivational interviewing techniques (0-not at all, 1-minimally, 2-to some extent, 3-a good deal, 4-a great extent). All raters underwent a brief training on motivational interviewing and watched a training video on health behavior change. The raters completed one counselling session together to ensure reliability between raters, with results showing interrater reliability .20 points of one another.

Results: Results showed that on average counselors used motivational interviewing techniques a good deal of the time at baseline ($t_0=2.71$) and improved slightly to post ($t_1=2.75$) yet did not reach significant improvements for overall score ($p=0.87$). Counselors with limited counseling experience at baseline showed greater improvements over time ($t_0=2.63$; $t_1=2.83$; $p=0.29$).

Conclusion: These findings indicate that graduate dietetic students were already using motivational interviewing techniques as part of their counseling sessions but did show slight improvements, especially in those with low counseling experience.

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