

ATTITUDES AND KNOWLEDGE OF US HEALTHCARE PROVIDERS ABOUT THE SAFETY AND NUTRITIONAL VALUE OF SEAFOOD

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An internet-based survey was developed and implemented to ascertain the knowledge and attitudes of U.S. healthcare providers regarding the benefits and risks of seafood consumption. The survey addressed the following key areas: demographics, knowledge, attitudes toward seafood safety/nutrition, and attitudes towards the strength of scientific knowledge about seafood. Approximately 50% of survey respondents can be categorized as frequent seafood eaters (eat seafood >1/wk). Of 46 knowledge-based questions, the respondents overall knowledge score was only 56%. Professionals identifying themselves as MD/DO, RD/Nutritionists (RDN), RN/LPN/Nurse Midwife (RNLP) or Nurse Practitioner/Physicians' Assistant scored 59%, 70%, 53% and 57% respectively. All professionals scored below the mastery level, considered to be 80%. For knowledge categories of seafood safety/contaminants, seafood health/nutrition and general seafood safety, the overall knowledge scores for the entire respondent pool were only 38%, 69%, and 59%, respectively. Overall attitude scores, based on a 5-point Likert scale (1=strongly disagree, 5=strongly agree) ranged from 2.3 to 3.5, with a total average score of 3.3. These lackluster, not overly positive attitude scores, coupled with very low knowledge scores, could present potential barriers for outreach efforts by food safety educators to US Healthcare Providers. Only 170 (26%, N=641) respondents knew the specific guidance recommended in the U.S. FDA/EPA advisory about seafood. Of those answering correctly, 85 % were from the MD/DO, RDN, RNLP groups. Furthermore, 88% of these 3 medical groups identified themselves as Not Aware or Not Knowledgeable of the advisory and, therefore, were given the opportunity to read the guidance online prior to answering the knowledge questions about the advisory. Regardless of patient demographics, respondents indicated that the best place for patients to obtain seafood information and the best way to dispense information was by health care providers (MD/DO, RD/N) and brochures written by medical professionals or government agencies. Finally, the respondents indicated that the top three formats preferred for their own training about the benefits and risks of eating seafood were brochures/pamphlets/ fact sheets (57%), quick reference guides (46%) and web based training (38%). The results of this survey will enhance the identification and understanding of the challenges associated with providing clear, concise and accurate information to the U.S. healthcare community regarding seafood health and safety issues.