

## Creating Healthy Work Environments 2019

### Tip-Toeing Into Plant-Based Nutrition in the Work Environment

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Organizations need to focus on creating opportunities for employees to be healthier and have healthier work environments. Obesity, heart disease and diabetes are major chronic diseases experienced by all Americans and this includes nurses. There has been extensive research on the benefits of plant-based nutrition to prevent and reverse these chronic disease. Nurses at 2 organizations had an opportunity to participate in a 21 day plant-based nutrition program so they could experience the benefits and challenges of incorporating this nutritional change into their lifestyle. Cholesterol levels were drawn before and after the study and weights were recorded. In both groups there was a significant drop in cholesterol levels (74%) with up to a 60 point decrease in 21 days and 64% of the participants lost weight without counting calories or focusing on portion size. The four major food groups included vegetables, fruits, legumes and grains.

In June of 2017, The American Medical Association recommended that hospitals provide plant-based meals for patients and staff and remove processed meats. In addition, they recommended providing healthier beverages. Some hospitals have incorporated these recommendations and provide a plant-based meal at all times and only provide sugar free beverages. Other hospitals and work environments have not made significant changes or implemented any recommendations.

The American Nurses Association has a Healthy Nurse program and is trying to help nurses achieve healthier lifestyles so they can be stronger role models for their patients as well as be healthier employees and community members. ANA completed a Health Risk Assessment in June 2012 and found that 70% of respondents were either obese or overweight with 40% being obese. A majority of the participants were in the 30 to 39 year old age range and only 40% said they ate the recommended 4 or more servings of fruit and vegetables a day. There are a wide variety of opportunities in which hospitals and other places of employment can offer healthier nutritional options to their employees. In both of these organizations, nurses and other employees wanted to experience plant-based nutrition and learn how it could impact their health.

An advanced practice nurse, who was certified in plant-based nutrition and with expertise in this area, was brought in to develop a program in which nurses and other colleagues could experience the benefits and challenges of a plant based nutritional program. In order to have data for this program, cholesterol levels were drawn before and after the program and participants recorded their weight in their own homes before and after the program. They also completed surveys before and after the 21 days focusing on their consumptions of specific foods and the impact it had on their behavior and emotions. The results of the program were significant with participants losing weight, significantly reducing their cholesterol, positively impacting their sleep, concentration, and other behaviors.

The program consisted of a presenter, the advanced practice nurse, sharing research and information on plant-based nutrition with participants. They then followed a free online 21 day nutritional program, outlined by a national plant-based non-profit organization, in which they received menus, recipes, grocery lists and viewed cooking demos. They had ongoing support from the presenter plus additional educational programs during the 21 days.

This program provided an opportunity for them to experience plant-based nutrition, which could assist them in reaching their health goals. They were able to share the challenges they experienced and then identified opportunities to make changes both at home and in their work environments. They were able to identify behaviors they could implement immediately as well as those that would take longer to complete. In collaboration with their colleagues, they identified organizational changes that could be made in the

future to allow them to continue their new healthy eating habits and reduce their exposure for chronic disease and be healthier role models for their patients and colleagues.

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**Title:**

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**Keywords:**

Nutrition, Chronic disease and Healthy food

**References:**

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**Abstract Summary:**

This presentation is an opportunity to learn what nurses and faculty experienced during a 21 day plant-based nutritional program in their work environments. Specific ideas and suggestions will be shared on how plant-based nutrition can be incorporated into organizations.

**Content Outline:**

**Reasons for introducing plant based nutrition**

Healthier employees physically and emotionally

Opportunity for employees to lose weight, reduce diabetes, heart disease and other chronic illnesses

Reduced cost of health premiums

## **Components of 21 day Plant-based program**

Watch Film Forks Over Knives

Information about research and chronic disease

Menue, grocery lists, cooking demonstrations

Buddy system

Ongoing support throughout program

Lab data collected - cholesterol and weight

## **Benefits of program**

Lowered cholesterol - 74% and up to 60 points in 3 weeks

Lost weight - 64%

Sleeping better

Increased energy

## **Nutritional opportunities to create healthier work environments**

Request healthy food at all meetings and conferences

Bring in speakers to organizations on benefits of plant-based nutrition

Have local restaurants and chefs provide plant based meals for staff

Have monthly pot lucks with plant based recipes

Have cafeterias offer plant-based option for all meals

Offer a 10 or 21 day program for employees to experience the benefits of plant-based nutrition

Create a committee to focus on monthly education for employees to learn about the benefits of plant-based nutrition

Have monthly movies focusing on plant-based nutrition - Forks Over Knives etc

Have a monthly book club focusing on nutrition and chronic disease

Begin Meatless Mondays in the cafeteria

First Primary Presenting Author

**Primary Presenting Author**

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**Professional Experience:** I have been an advanced practice nurse for over 40 years and practiced plant based nutrition for 20 years. I have presented on this topic at many state and national nursing conferences and am a member of the Medical advisory Board for the Physician Committee For Responsible Medicine and am certified by eCornell.

**Author Summary:** Joanne Evans is an Advanced Practice Nurses and is certified in plant-based nutrition through eCornell and has presented on this topic at many state and national nursing conference. She has authored "Is Your Next Prescription from The Pharmacy or the Farmers Market" in AHNA and Nurses Experience the Benefits and Challenges of Plant-based Nutrition in AJN. She is the Executive Director of Healthy Nurses...Healthy Communities and provides workshops on PBN to nurses and hospitals