

# A cooking-as-medicine revolution is entering the health care world

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Olivia Beisler (right), a health coaching graduate student, chats with medical student McKenna Campbell-Potter (center) and doctorate of nursing practice student Ann Hayden while cooking on December 6, 2017, at the Food Matters for Health Professionals class held at Good Acres Kitchen in Falcon Heights, Minnesota. Photo by: Lelia Navidi/Minneapolis Star Tribune/TNS

Some doctors are trading in their white lab coats for aprons.

At the University of Minnesota anyone training to be a doctor, nurse or counselor can also take cooking classes.

Today's assignment: Prepare a delicious, healthful meal to treat patients' specific health problems.

"Smells like a steak," Theodore Wang said, as he sprinkled a pinch of salt over mushrooms simmering in olive oil.

It was his last class in the six-week course, Food Matters for Health Professionals. It pairs the art of cooking with the science of using food as medicine.

Taught by a doctor and a chef, the course reflects a growing awareness of the link between food and health.

## **Developing Thoughtful Eating Habits**

Instructors Dr. Kate Shafto and Jenny Breen developed the class. They want to teach aspiring health professionals how to care for both their patients and themselves through healthy meals and thoughtful eating habits.

For too long, Shafto and Breen say, information about how to cook and eat healthy foods has been the missing ingredient in health care education. They're at the vanguard of a cooking-as-medicine revolution. Nationwide, at least 10 medical schools teach cooking as a form of medicine, according to the medical journal *Population Health Management*.

"There is a growing movement across the United States to incorporate cooking and food into health care," said Shafto, an assistant professor at the university. "Food is one of the most important things, because it's something we engage in every day of our lives."

Breen, a health expert, had connections to the Good Acre, an agricultural hub near St. Paul, Minnesota, that provides space and support to local farmers. The class for health professional students takes place in Good Acre's teaching kitchen. They use fresh produce grown by the local farmers. Breen and Shafto saw a pressing need to design a practical course for aspiring health professionals.

Breen says a healthy way of life can act as preventive medicine for diseases, but as a society we aren't doing enough to encourage healthy habits.

## **A Poor Diet Can Cause Serious Problems**

Obesity, diabetes and high blood pressure are just a few of the serious health problems caused in part by poor diets.

Our society was once based on farming, but better technology has allowed us to shop in grocery stores. Shafto says this change has affected the food system and brought many health problems as a result.

"Our diets have been stripped of rich vitamins, fiber and minerals," she said. She added that because of better technology, people are more sedentary. That exposes people to more pollution and stress.

The Food Matters for Health Professionals course covers topics such as diet and the importance of eating healthy fats.

And because stress and tiredness is common among health care providers, the course also includes information about self-care. Students learn how to eat thoughtfully, take deep breaths before eating, sit down to eat with others and slow down enough to taste their food.

Throughout the course, the students kept a journal and recorded their eating habits.

"They were amazed at how much they weren't paying attention," Breen said.

### **Food To Help Ailing Patients**

For their final assignment, the students formed teams and received case studies of fictitious patients struggling with different ailments. Each team needed to make a main dish and a side dish designed to help their patient.

"Before this course, I wouldn't say I was much of a cook at all," said McKenna Campbell-Potter, 23, a medical student. "I am becoming more confident."

Her patient was "Maria," a woman struggling with her weight. Maria worries about heart disease and has tried several diets in the past without success.

Campbell-Potter and her teammates surfed the Internet for recipes. They settled on making pan-seared salmon with tzatziki sauce and mashed cauliflower with garlic and herbs.

The salmon uses healthy fats to add flavor and make the patient feel full, she explained. And the mashed cauliflower is a healthy alternative to mashed potatoes.

### **A Dish That Is Spicy ... And Healthy**

Campbell-Potter said she took the class after hearing rave reviews from previous students.

"Our medical education really lacks nutrition education," she said. "We don't learn what a patient should eat. This class helps to set the framework for that."

Meanwhile, Wang was busy slicing carrots into matchsticks nearby.

His team chose to make Bibimbap, a Korean dish that looks like a rice bowl. It has kimchi — pickled vegetables — carrots, mushrooms, spinach, hot sauce and a fried egg on top. A salad with Greek yogurt dressing was also served.

Wang, who is studying counseling, said he hoped the yogurt and kimchi would help his team's patient, "Julia." She is a 37-year-old woman with anxiety and depression who also wants to lose weight. The case study also noted that she loves to eat at Chipotle.

He and his teammates chose their recipe because they learned that pickled foods and yogurt can improve gut health. This can then also help with anxiety and depression. His team thought that if their patient likes Chipotle, then she would probably enjoy the spicy flavors of Bibimbap.

## Quiz

- 1 Read the sentences from the section "A Poor Diet Can Cause Serious Problems."

*Throughout the course, the students kept a journal and recorded their eating habits.*

*"They were amazed at how much they weren't paying attention," Breen said.*

Which of the following conclusion can be drawn from these sentences?

- (A) The students were surprised to find that their eating habits needed improvement.
- (B) The students were surprised at how much their health improved after following a new diet.
- (C) The students were surprised to find how difficult it was to follow a healthy diet.
- (D) The students were surprised at how helpful keeping a journal was in tracking eating habits.

- 2 Read the section "Food To Help Ailing Patients."

Which paragraph explains the students' reasoning for the dishes they selected for their case studies?

- (A) For their final assignment, the students formed teams and received case studies of made-up patients struggling with different ailments. Each team needed to make a main dish and a side dish designed to help their patient.
- (B) "Before this course, I wouldn't say I was much of a cook at all," said McKenna Campbell-Potter, 23, a medical student. "I am becoming more confident."
- (C) Campbell-Potter and her teammates surfed the Internet for recipes. They settled on making pan-seared salmon with tzatziki sauce and mashed cauliflower with garlic and herbs.
- (D) The salmon uses healthy fats to add flavor and make the patient feel full, she explained. And the mashed cauliflower is a healthy alternative to mashed potatoes.

- 3 Read the paragraph from the section "Developing Thoughtful Eating Habits."

*For too long, Shafto and Breen say, information about how to cook and eat healthy foods has been the missing ingredient in health care education. They're at the forefront of a cooking-as-medicine revolution. Nationwide, at least 10 medical schools teach cooking as a form of medicine, according to the medical journal Population Health Management.*

Why did the author use the word "revolution"?

- (A) to show that newly improved diets have already begun to transform people's health
  - (B) to show that some people have not accepted the new ideas about healthy food education
  - (C) to show that many changes are being made in the way health care professionals are educated
  - (D) to show that medical schools have been fighting for this program for some time
- 4 Read the paragraph from the section "Developing Thoughtful Eating Habits."

*Breen, a health expert, had connections to the Good Acre, an agricultural hub near St. Paul, Minnesota, that provides space and support to local farmers. The class for health professional students takes place in Good Acre's teaching kitchen. They use fresh produce grown by the local farmers. Breen and Shafto saw a pressing need to design a practical course for aspiring health professionals.*

Which phrase from the paragraph shows an urgent tone?

- (A) health expert
- (B) space and support
- (C) pressing need
- (D) practical course