**Laura Thompson – SEL Reflection**

**Reflect on a lesson you were taught by your interactions with the clients. What was the situation? How was their care impacted? How will you apply what you learned moving forward in future SEL and patient/client interactions? (400 words)**

One lesson that was most obvious to me during these last eight weeks is how to motivate an ambivalent client through motivational interviewing. Along with learning motivational interviewing is the understanding that it is a partnership between the dietitian and the client and not just a way to encourage motivation. This partnership is a collaboration with clients, recognizing that the client is the expert in his or her own life. A dietitian may have so much information to give and may be valuable in helping clients understand nutrition. However, if a client is ambivalent and does not feel like their needs, barriers, and desires are heard, it will not matter how much knowledge a dietitian can bring in.

I appreciated being able to practice motivational interviewing during these eight weeks to practice how to evoke a client’s priorities, values, and experiences to explore reasons for change and support their success. Going into this lab I thought that if I just gave the client the knowledge I have, then they would want to change. I thought that giving the advice was what my job entailed. However, I have learned that taking a nonjudgmental stance, expressing empathy, highlighting or affirming client strengths, summarizing key points of conversation, and respecting clients’ autonomy goes much farther in eliciting change than any advice I may be able to give. I learned that being there to support and guide and allowing the choice to fully be the client’s is imperative to providing nutritional interventions that will be successful. One other lesson is how important identifying and understanding barriers to change can be in examining why a client may be ambivalent toward a specific intervention. Care is positively impacted when using techniques such as MI as it can enhance the partnership between provider and client, promote behavior change, improve communication, and increase positive patient outcomes.

Using motivational interviewing can also provide many benefits to the client. First, it may help with building the client's self-confidence and trust in themselves. It teaches responsibility and empowers clients to become more receptive to change which can lower the chance of future relapse. This was evident when talking with a client whose response to questions also got her to reflect on how her past experiences were impacting her food decisions now. Ultimately, I feel motivational interviewing can be an effective way to help people who may be initially resistant to starting any type of intervention or who are unprepared to make the necessary life changes. I will be using many of the motivational interviewing approaches in my career as a dietitian and am grateful for the opportunity to study and practice this counseling technique during this SEL.

**Looking back on your weekly reflections, what did you notice about yourself in your video reflections? What attributes did you identify that will help you be successful moving through the program as a future RDN? What personality traits did you notice that enhanced your self-awareness? Did any themes emerge for you personally as you progressed through your SEL? How did motivational interviewing impact your care? (400 words)**

I appreciated the video reflections for a few reasons. First, I was able to notice improved confidence in myself as the weeks went on. I was extremely nervous about the first video and was not confident in if I was presenting myself well or getting my points across effectively. However, by the end of the eight weeks, I was not at all nervous and had developed a style of relaying my videos to an audience. I used PowerPoint as a visual to highlight the key questions or points that I was asked to speak about. I used the same template for each reflection which made it easier to quickly exchange the information each week.

A personality trait that I noticed was that I was passionate about the subject matter, and it was difficult to keep my videos to less than three minutes. I wanted to keep talking about each slide for more than the allotted time and had to keep practicing timing my reflections before I recorded the videos to see if I could become more and more succinct. I noticed that becoming concise in videos became easier to do as the weeks went by.

It also became easy to use the videos to enhance my critical thinking and self-awareness. It allowed me a chance to consider how I am learning, what I am learning, why I am learning, as well as understand that each reflection is a process of learning that is just as important as classroom learning or other course material. Themes I noticed while filming my reflections is that I am a visual learner and I liked to use PowerPoint to give visuals that compliment what I was speaking on as I considered that others may also be visual in their learning style. I was also drawn to other peer videos that used a visual background beyond just videoing themselves. For me, it was easier to follow their train of thought and I was more engaged with their videos when I also had something beside the person to focus on. This is the outcome I wanted for peers who may be watching my videos so including a visual element was important to me.

As I spoke about above, motivational interviewing can be a very effective nutrition counseling tool for me to use to help elicit responses from clients who may be ambivalent about change. Learning and understanding MI was one of my favorite parts of this SEL lab. MI is a tool I intend to keep practicing in other courses and SELs as well as my own dietetic practice in the future.

**How did you practice empathy with your patients/clients and yourself throughout this lab? How will you continue to enhance your ability to be empathetic with your patients/clients and yourself? What ways will you continue to use MI in your practice? (400 words)**

This SEL course was great at helping us practice empathy with clients. First, there were several assignments that allowed us to really think about our own biases and perspectives on the world. For example, the assignment that had various scenarios on understanding all the resources in our community and how difficult it may be to continue good nutrition when barriers such as transportation, no insurance, no shelter or housing, or financial difficulties may directly impact our food choices. Another assignment focused on weight biases and another focused on cultural biases. These assignments elicited empathy in me as I was able to fully comprehend both external and internal biases that may impact how people, especially health care professionals, have towards those of a different ethnic or cultural background. These assignments also highlight how diet culture and weight stigma have impacted those in a bigger body. I was surprised how many experiences people had with their own doctor when discussing their health and the focus being only on weight. I am fortunate that I have not seen this bias when working with providers or in my own care when seeing my own doctors.

Continuing to break the stigmas and use strategies such as Health at Every Size (HAES) and Intuitive Eating (IE) as appropriate approaches to healthcare that are more inclusive and focus on overall health will be key to future success with clients that we see. This is especially important to me as I want to work with those with eating disorders. I will be using many key elements of Health at Every Size and intuitive eating in my own practice. Both approaches are weight inclusive approaches that acknowledge the natural diversity in body shapes and sizes. Both approaches elicit empathy by understanding the ineffectiveness and dangers of diet culture and only focusing on weight loss. Both approaches help clients be kinder to their bodies and cope with emotions surrounding food choices. Both approaches encourage listening to your body and what it needs to be nourished and satiated.

Lastly, using motivational interviewing helps me express empathy through careful and nonjudgmental listening as the client talks about their presenting problem. This type of counseling style creates empathy through the techniques used in MI such as open-ended questions, active listening, and supportive responses including affirming, reflection, and summarizing. I feel this approach really allows the provider to experience what the client experiences or allows the provider to “walk in the other person’s shoes”.

**What changes did you notice happening within yourself as you progressed through these SEL experiences in this lab? What were some positive changes you noticed that brought about feelings of confidence or happiness? What were some that caused you a bit of worry or anxiety? Were there any dichotomies that presented themselves that you processed as a future RDN? (400 words)**

Being able to learn different nutritional counseling techniques and approaches such as motivational interviewing, Health at Every Size, and intuitive eating has provided me with an opportunity to critically engage in the learning material while also allowing a deeper and more meaningful understanding of academic knowledge that I can use in future internship opportunities. I had many chances to practice different competencies during this round of community service-learning experience hours by understanding the resources in my own community, practicing counseling skills with other classmates, friends, and family members, and creating various visual projects and presentations through different mediums.

As I get further along in the courses and the various SEL experiences, I continue to be excited to use these experiences to enhance my future career as a dietitian. The community setting is of special interest to me as this career path allows me to combine my love for nutrition with my passion for helping people in a meaningful way. I still feel my passion lies with helping those in the eating disorder community, sports nutrition, or a combination of both. I also want to dispel the myths surrounding diet culture. I appreciated the opportunity to touch on both these topics when discussing HAES and IE during the course.

I noticed that the more I progress through the program, the more confident I am in my ability to help others. I felt a change in how I thought helping others looked like when we studied motivational interviewing. Before this SEL, I thought I needed to direct clients to the “right” choice for them and give more information to make that choice. However, after this SEL, I noticed that my mindset has changed to instead help support and guide the client in eliciting their own decisions regarding their care and food choices. I also am more aware of biases that may exist in both clients, in health care providers, and even in myself.

One interesting worry for me was understanding that any presentation needs to be literacy appropriate for a wide audience. This initially worried me as I had a hard time simplifying my material at times. For instance, making sure that the message I was conveying was also at an eight-grade reading level was difficult for me. But I learned the importance of adapting language to use simple, direct sentences, use easy wording and tones, understanding the audience I am presenting to, cater to different learning styles, and use visuals that may enhance and reinforce the material and not distract from it. Using these strategies can encourage interaction with the audience, providing a more meaningful experience. It can also alleviate dichotomies as all groups can feel seen and heard when information is presented in an accessible, encouraging, and empathetic way. This allows me to empower others by providing them with the tools necessary to make informed decisions about their nutrition choices and lifestyles. Ultimately, no matter what type of dietitian I become, I want to contribute to the betterment of individual and community health.

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