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

Lessons help us grow as people. Working in a clinical setting, there are ample opportunities to not only learn skills and competencies, but also learn lessons from the experiences provided to us. One lesson that stood out to me was performing my first nutrition focused physical exam (NFPE) by myself while my preceptor stood outside the door to the room of the patient. She was there just in case she was needed but pushed me to both talk with the patient and perform the exam by myself. Prevalence of malnutrition is high in hospital patients and my patient was no exception. He has already unintentionally lost 34 pounds in a 3-month period.

This first lesson taught me how to use a valuable tool (the NFPE) to provide essential insight into a patient’s overall health and nutritional status. The NFPE can be helpful diagnosing malnutrition using assessments physical findings across various regions of the body. It can also help diagnose hidden vitamin or mineral deficiencies in patients. By performing NFPEs on patients, I can identify malnutrition early, which will allow for better nutrition interventions. An NFPE may also reduce the length of hospital stays for many patients. Using an NFPE also taught me how to communicate findings to other providers of the multidisciplinary team as well as chart on those findings. Hopefully, this also allows other providers to understand the importance of the role of a registered dietitian in the clinical setting.

Another lesson comes from an old saying that “children are the best teachers.” One of my favorite activities during my SEL rotation was working with children in the kids’ culinary classes I helped facilitate in my community rotation. This experience was a great lesson on investing in nutrition. Cooking with children provides opportunities to teach them about food and nutrition. It also taught me to ask questions while cooking to get them more invested. For example, one question asked during this rotation was how the kids felt about savory and sweet foods. We had made popcorn balls and buttered popcorn with seasonings and had the kids compare and contrast their preferences. These questions and the class itself help increase healthy decision making down the road. It also allows me to understand how kids think and their preferences so that I can learn in how I interact with them as well as planning of new recipes to try with the children in the future. This entire experience also helped me grow in my own confidence. I will use insight from this experience in other encounters in future rotations and later in my own dietetic practice to help my clients feel confident and invested in their food decisions and nutritional health.

1. **Looking back on your weekly reflections, what did you notice about yourself in your writing? 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? (400 words)**

One characteristic that emerged in my writing is that I noticed I am better at reading research journals, understanding the subject material in them, and relaying that information to a patient, client, or presentation. This went well with my assignment of working on a prospectus where I learned to relay information from literature reviews and add or extend to the research with my own research question and study design. Studies in nutrition can be difficult for an individual to comprehend and can be overwhelming for a client. Being able to write in a way clients understand and to be able to take overwhelming information and give a presentation to clients using clear, concise, and easy to understand information in different mediums can help a client make informed decisions about their nutritional health. I appreciated these assignments went hand in hand with opportunities in the food service setting as I was able to attend a women’s conference and help present on how nutrition plays a role in skin health.

Another area of growth was in how I obtained scholarly sources. Since the class focused on research methods, I grew in my reading and understanding of articles and being able to relay that information to others. I also learned what to look for in these studies and how to form my own decisions about what the material presented says. I am more able to critically think about the source as a whole and ask questions related to the methods used, any biases presented, and any flaws in the study.

Although I loved the research and presentation projects, I did not care for the statistics assignments very much. I thought I left my math class days behind me. However, the assignments were a good refresher course, but I find that math calculations are more useful in both the intern setting and the real world. For example, calculating energy and protein needs is a calculation I do with every patient in the clinical setting.

I continue to be surprised by my commitment to my studies and time management. I have ADHD and sometimes time management can be an issue. However, deadlines push me as I know I cannot put the homework off. One thing that went much better for me this rotation was time management of my writing assignments. I have had trouble in other SEL classes getting the reflections done in a timely way. This time, I made sure to put deadlines in my calendar for these reflections and was able to get them done well before the due date. Had I not had deadlines, my executive functioning would not know what to accomplish first and each assignment would be too overwhelming because I would not know where to start. Putting a timeline in place helped prioritize what to do next.

1. **How did you practice empathy with your patients and yourself throughout this lab? How will you continue to enhance your ability to be empathetic with your patients and yourself? (400 words)**

In the world of nutrition, empathy is an important part of communicating with clients and the community in a compassionate and non-judgmental way. It is not enough to be an expert in the field of nutrition if we do not also use empathy when communicating with our patients. I once heard someone say that kindness is a person who genuinely wants to help, empathy allows the person to help in the best way possible. Because of this, I always try to put myself in the shoes of the patient so I can understand what they may be feeling or experiencing and see things from their perspective.

One area where empathy is important is during the food distributions I was able to be a part of. These distributions help individuals and families that may not otherwise have the means to provide nutritious resources for their families. Whispering Roots does more than help provide food. We also go into the schools and other areas in Omaha to help start gardens and promote growing food as well. This helps our clients and the community have more resources for sustainability. Empathy plays a crucial role in fostering environmental sustainability in nutrition resources. It connects the community to the environment and fosters a relationship with food because they see the food at all stages of growth, distribution, preparation, and consumption. Understanding and nurturing this relationship can lead to more environmentally conscious behaviors and a greater commitment to sustainability. Empathy serves as a bridge between our individual choices and the broader impact on the planet. By cultivating empathy, we can make more informed and compassionate decisions that contribute to a sustainable future.

I also saw empathy in the food service management rotation. Getting to see a new software system implemented gave me empathy for the food service workers. Learning a new system is no easy task. Some of the kitchen staff, like Marcy, had been there 45 years. It would not be easy to go from a system she knew so well to relearning where all the food products were in the new system, learning new reporting, and doing it all while taking live food orders from patients who were not always in a good mental state or had dietary restrictions. She did all this with a smile and a kind and caring voice, even when frustrations arose in the processing of orders or other staff acted irritated.

One thing I would like to continue to do is practice empathy in my future career. Currently, in my SEL rotations, I can take the time to truly understand my patient’s health issues, concerns, preferences, and challenges. I would also want to create a safe space for my clients that is judgement free and allows a client to be open about their feelings towards food, their body, and their health. As I grow in my dietetic skills, another way to practice empathy is to set realistic goals with clients without trying to fix them. Often, clients only hear what to eat and what to avoid. Their experiences and other obstacles are not considered. I want to approach the planning of nutritional goals with sensitivity and understanding of where a client is at and what they have already experienced. I want to be the type of dietitian who is kind and caring and can understand what each client who comes to me is going through.

1. **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)**

One of the best things about an internship is the hands-on experience in various aspects of clinical, community, and food service nutrition. I noticed a change in my willingness to go beyond my comfort zone during those experiences as I assess patients’ nutritional needs and provide nutrition interventions, nutrition education, or nutrition resources to individuals in the community. I get anxious when put in new situations that I have not experienced before. Pushing beyond my comfort level, I spent time practicing effective communication, active listening, asking questions, and nutrition focused physical exams.

Another change that I noticed was better confidence in my decisions and abilities in real-world nutrition situations. Navigating complex nutritional health issues using the nutrition care process takes practice as does skills related to meal preparation, food safety, and managing nutrition programs. I became more adept at charting, writing diet orders, kitchen management, and understanding key diet modifications. The more I practice the more these skills will become second nature.

I felt happiest when teaching the kids cooking classes. These classes are fun because I enjoy working with children, making new recipes, and working with the staff at Whispering Roots. Seeing the kids proud of their own food creations fills me with happiness. Knowing I am making a difference in their future food relationship and choices not only gives me confidence to keep going but also gives me joy that I get to share those experiences with them.

I also noticed some dichotomies while in these experiences. Even though food is a necessary element to live, we do not just use food as fuel. We also choose food based on behavioral, emotional, and physiological factors. For instance, while working with Marcy in the dietary office, she took a call from a client on a low sodium diet. Though the patient was trying to pick foods based on what would be best physically for her, she was having a hard time understanding why she could not also have a few items she loved. Marcy was calm and patient as she walked the patient through why certain food choices such as a veggie burger were a higher sodium choice than a chef salad with light dressing. The patient thought that anything with “veggie” in the title would mean it was healthy for her diet. However, Marcy let her know that the more processed the item is, the more likely it will have a higher amount of sodium. Sometimes connecting education to a situation is needed to align nutrition goals with physiological, behavioral, or emotional hurdles.

In summary, a nutrition internship can impart important nutritional skills, shape approaches to patient care, encourage empathy, and foster lifelong learning. It’s a transformative experience that prepares dietetic interns like me for their rewarding journey in the field of nutrition.

Screenshot

A screenshot of a computer

Description automatically generated