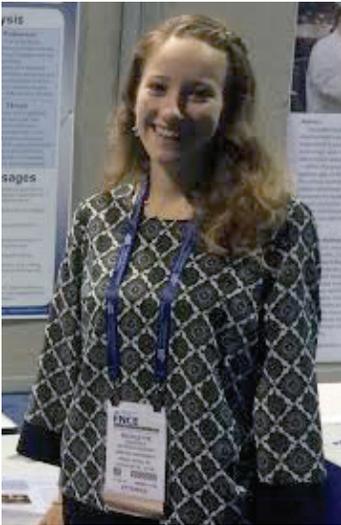


MDA Member Spotlight Features: Nicolette Star Maggiolo

Tracy Phelan, RD



Fast food, sedentary lifestyle, and lack of education are some of the reasons for the dramatic rise in childhood obesity. It is estimated that obesity has doubled in children and quadrupled in adolescents over the past 30 years. (1) In 2012, more than one third of children and adolescents were obese. (1)

Through her recent work, Nicolette Star Maggiolo has learned the importance of effective education when it comes to promoting a healthy lifestyle amongst children and adolescents to decrease their risk for obesity. Over the past two years Nicolette has been working with Boston University professor Paula A. Quatromoni, DSc, MS, RD in the development of the education curriculum, KickinNutrition.tv.

You are currently a senior at Boston University. What drew you to this particular dietetics program?

The clinically-focused dietetics track, combined with the opportunity to explore fieldwork, initially drew me to attend Boston University. Nutrition has been an important part of my life. When I was in elementary school, my father suffered from an aneurysm. As a result, I understood early on just how important nutrition was in both my father's immediate recovery and further disease prevention. A few years later, I began coaching my hometown's middle school girls volleyball team. I loved empowering individuals to achieve their goals. After exploring careers in the health profession, I knew I wanted to work as a registered dietitian.

You have been an integral member of the KickinNutrition.tv development team. What is this project about?

KickinNutrition.tv (KNTV) is a digital nutrition education curriculum designed for middle school students. This truly unique solution addresses the many challenges of delivering effective nutrition education to middle school students by incorporating digital technology, peer-education, and online activities to extend learning from school to home. KNTV consists of six lessons, built around comedy episodes featuring Reyna, a teen who dreams of becoming a celebrity chef. Adolescent dilemmas lead Reyna and her friends into the kitchen, where they cook up healthy solutions. Each lesson integrates comedy, cooking demonstrations, didactic nutrition education, teacher-moderated discussions, fitness breaks, and in-class activities using pause-and-play videos. The curriculum teaches skills that empower students to set personal nutrition goals.

In your opinion, how important is education when it comes to combating childhood obesity?

It is essential. However, there are many barriers to effective nutrition and health education in schools including limited curriculum time, non-standardized curriculum and lack of professional development. With the help of programs like KNTV, I truly believe we can better educate and empower today's youth. However, it may take more than one curriculum to address childhood obesity in this country.

This year you travelled to FNCE to present a poster in relation to your work with KickinNutrition.tv. What was that experience like?

While my two-year involvement in the KNTV curriculum development was a positive experience, attending FNCE truly brought the project full circle for me. I was so honored that our abstract was chosen under the category of Innovations in Dietetics Practice and Education. It was an incredible opportunity to incorporate all of the professional skills I have learned into an educational moment for my colleagues interested in this unique development of digital nutrition education.

What's next in terms of your career?

My dream is to continue with my training in a dietetic internship next fall. I look forward to a career working with colleagues from various disciplines in health care. While I am open to which area of dietetics I may specialize in, I have a feeling that research will always be a part of my career as a dietitian. There is still so much more to learn.

References:

1. Ogden CL, Carroll MD, Kit BK, Flegal KM. Prevalence of childhood and adult obesity in the United States, 2011-2012. *Journal of the American Medical Association*. 2014;311(8):806-814.

Tracy Phelan is a registered dietitian working the Boston area. She graduated from Queen Margaret University in 2010 with a bachelor's degree in nutrition and dietetics. She moved to the U.S. in 2011 to pursue her career in dietetics and specifically weight management.