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Taking the Renal Diet on a Field Trip

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Topic: Hemodialysis patients & their families struggle with renal diet compliance due to potassium, phosphorus & sodium restrictions. In our pediatric unit, we collect quality improvement data metrics monthly on phosphorus, calcium & intact parathyroid hormone levels (PTH). Phosphorus control is important as it can elevate PTH levels, which can lead to anemia, bone & heart disease. We noticed that our patients continued to have elevated phosphorus levels despite frequent bedside education sessions. To improve phosphorus levels we tried a new education technique.

Approach: In addition to bedside education sessions, we escorted our patients & families to the hospital cafeteria for lunch. At first we allowed patients to make their own food choices. With support of a nurse, nurse practitioner, & nutritionist, patients were coached on the renal diet & supported to make better choices. Patients were taught how to read nutrition labels & to look for words that indicate that foods had phosphorus additives. As a requirement to participate in this activity, patients were needed to bring their phosphate binders & to take them prior to eating lunch. The renal team was able to observe how patients took their binders & were able to suggest different ways of taking binders to help with swallowing large pills & taking the powder. Importance of phosphorus limitation, phosphorus binders, & physiology was reviewed with families through a jeopardy game where they could earn prizes.

Results: Some comments from families were: "This really helped the diet make sense," "I wasn't aware of this before, I'm so glad to learn it here." "We would love to do this again, it was helpful." The following month changes were noted to phosphorus, calcium & intact PTH levels in all patients. Prior to this experience, one patient had Phosphorus levels that were routinely 11, after this activity her levels were mostly 8-10.

Implications: By providing this additional educational experience away from the unit, we were able to see the struggles that many patients & families have with food selection. The renal team was able to guide patients & families with skills that will help them obtain desirable phosphorus levels with food choices & medication compliance.

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