Nutrition Education and Counseling Application Toolkit

Case Study #2: Ms. Marco

Ms. Marco is a 67 y o Latina female, 5’1”, 167#, widow who lives alone. She has elevated LDL, low HDL, hypertension, and elevated fasting blood sugar (“pre-DM”). Her doctor has written a referral for “low salt, low cholesterol, low sugar diet instructions.” She has come to see the RD in the outpatient clinic.

Sample Session #2 (demonstrates an overly directive, non-patient centered counseling style, and does not skillfully incorporate concepts of overall dietary patterns and whole diet approach)

RD: Hi Ms. Marco. I’m Toby. Tell me what brings you in today.

MM: My doctor told me I should talk to you. I’m confused, what can I eat? Everything I like is bad for me, it seems.

RD: I’m sure not everything you like is bad for you. Now, looking at your doctor’s referral, it seems she is most concerned about your blood pressure, your cholesterol, and your blood sugar. We probably can’t cover all of these topics today, but we can at least get started.

MM: Okay.

RD: How long have you been at your current weight?

MM: Oh, I don’t know exactly. I think I’ve gained about 20 pounds in the past 5 years or so.

RD: Your health issues are weight-related. So we should talk about weight loss today.

MM: Honestly, I think I’m fine just the way I am. I don’t think I need to lose any weight. I don’t want to get too skinny.

RD: Well, losing weight would be one of the best things you could do for your health. Let’s look at your food records.

MM: Alright.

RD: (Pause to look at food record.) I see that breakfast and dinner are your main meals. It looks like these meals are pretty consistent: cereal with whole milk and fruit for breakfast, then canned soup and crackers for dinner. Is that right?

MM: Yes, I don’t mind eating the same thing every day. It makes my life easier. Plus, I’m on a tight budget.
RD: And I see that in the afternoons you have a pastry and coffee. Is your coffee black or do you put something in it?

MM: I put about ¼ cup of milk and two spoons of sugar.

RD: Okay. How many cups of coffee do you typically have?

MM: Oh, several. Maybe five.

RD: That’s ten spoons of sugar each day! That’s too much. All that coffee isn’t good for you anyway. So that’s goal #1—to cut down to only one cup of coffee in the morning using diet sugar and drink herbal tea the rest of the day.

MM: Oooh, I was afraid you were going to say that.

RD: Are there other things you snack on during the day that you didn’t write down here?

MM: Hmmm, let’s see. Oh, of course there’s my candies and nuts. I like to eat peppermint candies all the time—see I have them in my purse right now-- and I go through a lot of nuts, probably two cups each day—I know those are fattening, but they have the healthy fat, right?

RD: These snacks aren’t good for you. You are right, nuts are very high in fat. If you must have the nuts, get the unsalted kind and cut way down on the portion size. And the candies are just empty calories, raising your blood sugar and making you gain weight.

MM: Okay, I’ll think about it. Maybe I’ll give up the candies and nuts.

RD: That’s probably for the best. Now, I also see that you have a pastry every day in the afternoon, with your coffee. Pastries are high in fat and sugar. I think you should avoid pastries and replace them with a healthy snack alternative, like fruits or vegetables.

MM: You mean like apples and carrot sticks?

RD: Yes, those would be examples. Ms. Marco, your diet is too high in saturated fat, sodium, and sugar, and low in fruits and vegetables. So if you want to improve your health, I recommend cutting out the pastry and eating at least five servings of fruits and vegetables each day.

MM: Oh. Okay.

RD: Good. And to lower your sodium intake, you could make soup from scratch instead of using canned soup.

MM: Oh, I see. Okay.
RD: If you’re serious about getting your blood pressure under control, you should switch to homemade soup, or at least try the lower-sodium canned kinds. I have some low sodium soup recipes if you would like.

MM: I guess I could try that.

RD: Good. Lastly, I see that you are drinking whole milk. That has too much saturated fat and calories. To lower your LDL cholesterol at lose weight, you should switch to 1% or nonfat milk.

MM: Oh, yes. Okay.

RD: So, in summary, your plan for the next two weeks is to cut down to one cup of coffee and switch to herbal tea, give up the candies and nuts and add in fruits and vegetables, cook a wholesome dinner instead of having canned soup, and switch to nonfat milk.

MM: I’ll do my best. (sounding skeptical)

RD: Okay, great. I’ll see you in two weeks, then, Ms. Marco.