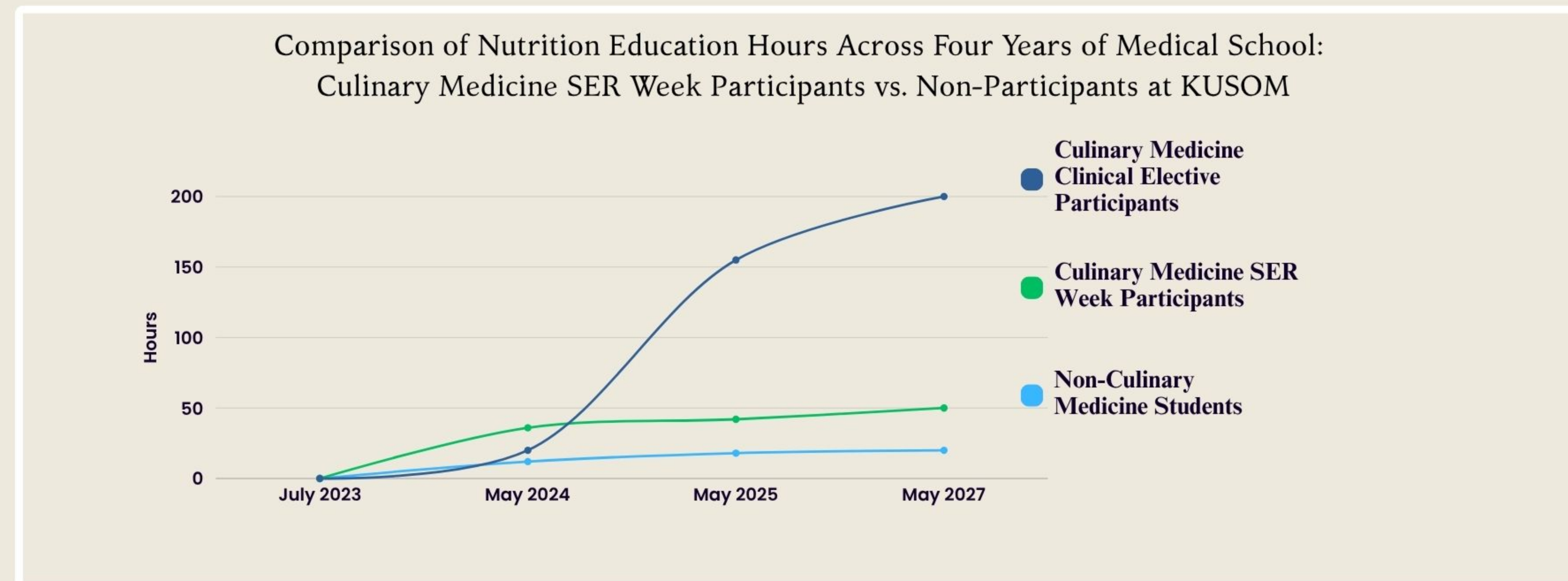


# Teaching Nutrition Through Experience: Initial Outcomes from a Culinary Medicine Elective Week for Medical Students



Authors: Grace Gyllenborg, BA<sup>1</sup>; Clare Brady, MD<sup>2</sup>; Margaret Smith, MD<sup>2</sup>; Marissa Love, MD<sup>3</sup>  
<sup>1</sup>University of Kansas School of Medicine; <sup>2</sup>Department of Family Medicine, University of Kansas Medical Center;  
<sup>3</sup>Division of Allergy, Clinical Immunology & Rheumatology, Department of Medicine, University of Kansas Medical Center



## 01. Introduction

Culinary Medicine bridges medical care and nutrition by combining evidence-based dietary principles with practical cooking skills to improve health outcomes. Early integration into undergraduate medical education remains limited. In United States medical schools, the quantity of nutrition education is widely regarded as insufficient, with students receiving, on average, fewer than 20 hours of instruction throughout the four years of training. This falls short of the recommended minimum of 25 hours, despite the well-established importance of nutrition in the prevention and management of disease and the promotion of overall health. This elective was designed to provide hands-on nutrition training and interdisciplinary collaboration within the existing Scholarly Enrichment and Research (SER) week for M1 students at University of Kansas Medical Center (KUMC).

## 02. Objectives

- To pilot an interprofessional culinary medicine elective during preclinical education.
- To assess feasibility, acceptability, and perceived value by students and faculty.

## 03. Methodology

The SER week program follows a hybrid model that combines online instruction through the Health meets Food® Culinary Medicine curriculum with hands-on experience in a pop-up teaching kitchen, led by a trained chef.

### Format

- 3-day immersive elective during SER weeks

### Participants

- 30 M1 students across 5 sessions
- 6 Allergy SER students
- 2 Allergy fellows
- 2 Dietetics graduate students

### Instructional Team

- Physicians, Registered Dietitians, graduate students, culinary instructors

### Online Component

- Independent learning modules on:
  - Food safety, allergies, and insecurity
  - Dietary interventions for chronic illnesses
    - anti-inflammatory, low-sodium, and diabetic diets
- Students complete reading assignments and quizzes independently to establish a strong knowledge base

### Hands-On

- 10 hours: culinary training with trained chef, in addition to dietitian and physician
- 8 hours: nutrition education and case-based learning with physicians and dietitians.
- 4 hours: community health education and service learning about food waste and recovery
- 2 hours: gardening and physical activity

## 04. Results/Findings

The success of this SER Week initiative culminated in the launch of the inaugural Culinary Medicine Clinical Elective, offered during the summer between the first and second years of medical school. Participating students committed over 135 hours across the span of one month, engaging in a comprehensive range of activities including gardening, volunteer service, culinary instruction, didactic coursework, clinical observation, and the practical application of culinary medicine in patient care. Additional components of the elective included community outreach, curriculum development, and the formulation of research proposals.

### FACULTY & INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT

- 5 physicians, 3 RDs/PhDs, 2 graduate students in nursing or dietetics
- faculty attended subsequent culinary/lifestyle medicine continuing medical education conferences.

### COMMUNITY MEMBER FEEDBACK

*"The recipes were easy, healthy, and used herbs we learned about. Students were enthusiastic and clearly enjoyed sharing their knowledge."*

### EDUCATIONAL IMPACT

- 3 students expanded into a 4-week elective for deeper clinical immersion
- 1 student completed a research project on food insecurity and food allergy
- students were exposed to lifestyle medicine, community outreach, and healthcare-adjacent professions

### STUDENT FEEDBACK

*"I have never eaten healthier than in these past three days, and I had a great time during it all!"*

## 05. Analysis

By understanding how to prepare healthy, delicious meals, healthcare providers can better support their patients in making sustainable lifestyle changes.

- 30 of 30 Students completed all requirements for the SER week.
- Each student completed 24 hours of direct nutrition education or nutrition-related learning experiences. This combined with pre-existing nutrition education increased their average nutrition education during medical school by two-fold.
- 16 of the 24 hours involved active and experiential learning which caters well to the adult learner
- 3 of 30 students continued on to do a summer elective for an intensive farm-to-table-clinic rotation, contributing additional service hours.

## 06. Future Directions

- Increase number of Culinary Medicine SER weeks (4-5 per year)
- Scale elective to include interprofessional learners (Dietetics, Nursing)
- Start student-led Lifestyle Medicine Interest Group
- School of Medicine will sponsor a certificate of distinction in lifestyle medicine in 2025

## 07. Conclusion

Culinary Medicine at KUMC addresses the lack of nutrition education in medical training by combining online learning with hands-on cooking and clinical application. This interdisciplinary pilot shows strong student engagement, interprofessional collaboration, and feasibility of early culinary medicine education. Culinary medicine offers a scalable, experience-based approach to improving nutrition literacy in future physicians.

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