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PERCEPTIONS AND PRACTICES REGARDING DIETARY SUPPLEMENTS OF NUTRITIONISTS WORKING WITH ELITE SOCCER CLUBS

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INTRODUCTION:

Dietary supplement use is widespread among soccer players. Nutritionists working with soccer clubs play a crucial role in the decision to supplement, and on the types of dietary supplements to recommend and in which situations. However, there is no evidence of their perceptions and practices regarding dietary supplements and the scientific evidence surrounding them. Therefore, this study aimed to assess this issue among nutritionists working with elite soccer clubs.

METHODS:

Nutritionists (N=134) working with elite soccer teams from six leagues in Europe (England, France, Germany, Italy, Portugal, and Spain) and Brazil were invited to participate. After ethical approval, practitioners were contacted via e-mail, and professional or personal networks. Data collection ran from 8 November 2022 to 8 February 2023, and used an anonymous online questionnaire with 19 questions, adapted from another used for a similar purpose (1). Overall, 62 nutritionists had responded (46.3% response rate); two refused to participate, and one was excluded due to incorrect fulfilment. Therefore, 59 nutritionists [34.6 (5.6) years] were included in the descriptive statistics analysis presented. Except for age (n=57), data are available for all and expressed in mean (SD) and percentages (%).

RESULTS:

Nearly all participants considered themselves knowledgeable and interested in dietary supplements (94.9% responded agree or strongly agree) and reported being often asked about these products (93.2%). Most nutritionists stated consider dietary supplements more effective for enhancing sports' physical and physiological performance (93.2%), fatigue recovery (81.4%), and enhancing sports' cognitive and mental performance (76.3%). The barrier to recommending dietary supplements mentioned by most nutritionists concerned about regulation (50.9%), whereas the enabler was having sufficient training in the area (76.3%) and autonomy to recommend supplements (59.3%). Also, most nutritionists reported wishing to learn more about dietary supplement use for sports performance (66.1%).

Regarding practices, most participants reported being dietary supplement users (57.6%) and recommending supplements regularly (69.5%). Obtaining information from evidence databases and academic journals (93.2%) and conferences (59.3%) were the sources stated by most nutritionists. Finally, some nutritionists reported selling dietary supplements (15.3%).

CONCLUSION:

Participants considered themselves knowledgeable and showed a great interest in learning about dietary supplements while also revealing caution about recommending supplement use. Nutritionists reported seeing these products as most effective for enhancing sports' physical and physiological performance, and having sufficient training was the main enabler for recommending supplement use. These findings provide novelty data and open new perspectives for research into supplement use in soccer.

REFERENCES:

1. Marx W, et al. Complement Ther Clin Pract. 2016;25:87-91

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