

Words About Wellness

Nutritional Wellness & the Need to Expand Access

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Nutritional Wellness is all over the news: be it the Mediterranean Diet, Plant based/Vegan Lifestyle, Gluten Free/Keto Diet, Intermittent Fasting or Local & Seasonal Foods. Social Influencers, celebrities and TV doctors have made it impossible to do anything without unsolicited nutritional advice being shoved down your throat. But how can people eat healthy and locally if they don't have access to gluten free pasta or local & seasonal food? In order to adopt a lifestyle that embraces nutritional wellness, we first need to address **food insecurity**.

Food insecurity is a lack of access to sufficient, good quality, nutritious and [culturally relevant](#) food. In North Carolina, food insecurity is an enormous problem. Our state ranks among the [10th](#) hungriest in the US. One in five patients that I see, in fact, reports experiencing food insecurity. These patients include:

- Children, Teens, College students
- Elderly & People with disabilities
- Single Female Household with dependents
- Ethnic Minorities

Many of these patients and their families' access SNAP, School-based Meal Programs, Congregate Meals and Food Pantries. But these interventions are not enough. These resources only provide a percentage of a patient/family's daily dietary needs, placing them in an impossible situation where they have to decide who gets to eat two to three meals daily. [Health Care providers](#) have produced research documenting the many negative effects and circular relationships between food insecurity and health outcomes. [These studies](#) also show that food insecurity incites a stress response that contributes to anxiety and depression.

Continued on next page...

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Part of what makes food insecurity so difficult to solve is that the underlying causes of [inequality](#), poverty, unemployment/under-employment and politics are deeply interconnected. Here are a few ways you can help at the clinical, administrative and legislative levels:

- Screen, educate, & link patients to resources
- Start or support your department or local community in creating an emergency food pantry
- Advocate to expand SNAP benefits, School-based meal programs, Fair Wages & similar programs
- Donate cash to [local](#) pantry/shelter programs or organizations like [Feeding America](#), [No Hungry Kid](#), Table Inc., Empty Bowls or your local grocery store
- Volunteer at a local food pantry/shelter (and not only on Thanksgiving and Christmas)

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