Peer food allergy educational videos: improving knowledge, attitudes, and support for students with food allergy

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Aims: Impacting 1 in 13 students or 8% of children, food allergy is a major public health concern in the United States. Peer support is associated with increased quality of life and improved management of food allergies; however, currently there are limited resources available for schools to educate the peers of students with food allergy. The objective of this study was to determine topic areas and format preferences for an educational video for peers of students with food allergies.

Methods: An online survey was created and disseminated via advocacy groups and social media. Only families with children under 18 years of age with food allergies were asked to participate. Children with the support of their parents were asked to complete the survey. Domains included: 1) Current peer knowledge; 2) current peer attitudes toward students with food allergy; 3) preferred topics areas for the video; and 4) video format preferences.

Results: Forty-one families participated in the survey. Among these children, 70.7% had been left out of an activity because of their food allergy. About 85.4% of the children believe that their classmates would not recognize a food allergy reaction. Almost all (97.6%) thought that an educational video to teach their classmates about food allergies would be beneficial. The top four messages to discuss in the videos are: “Cross-contamination” (70.0%); “How serious a food allergy is” (57.5%); “Ways peers can support with food allergy” (57.5%); and “What is anaphylaxis” (40.0%).

Conclusions: Significant concerns around school activities and peers knowledge of food allergy reactions were expressed. Our data suggests developing food allergy educational videos are needed to improve knowledge and support among peers of students with food allergy. The development of these videos can help foster a healthier environment for both food allergic students and peers alike.