



The Medical **Bulletin**

Guest Editorial



Dr. V. Balachandran
MD, MINAMS, FRCP, FACC

How to Prescribe Food as Medicine

Most of us are beginning to recognize that the food we eat can have a profound effect on our health, longevity, and well-being.

While hardly new, the food-as-medicine concept — in which clinicians prescribe diet changes as part of formal treatment plans — A whole-food, predominantly plant-based diet has been shown to prevent, treat, and even reverse some chronic diseases.

As more people grow receptive to the idea of so-called "pharmacy" prescriptions, clinicians must fully grasp the evidence that overwhelmingly supports the efficacy of prescribing whole-food, plant-predominant diets. We have a responsibility to equip ourselves with the resources and knowledge to prescribe food appropriately and effectively. Any of us can suggest that a patient eat more vegetables. But can we apply the concept of the dietary spectrum when making recommendations, help patients avoid common pitfalls when using calorie density to lose weight, or identify which macronutrient sources may contribute to disease progression? Probably not. The average 4-year medical school curriculum spends less than 1% of all lecture time on nutrition, and one study found that only 14% of internal medicine resident physicians reported feeling qualified to offer nutritional advice to patients. Yet we know that it is what people are and are not eating that is the number-one cause of mortality globally.

Resources are available from the American College of Lifestyle Medicine (ACLM), the nation's medical professional society representing clinicians dedicated to a lifestyle medicine and food-as-medicine—first approach to healthcare. ACLM, which represents 7000 physicians and allied health professionals, is the only organization that educates, equips, and supports certification of physicians and other clinicians in lifestyle medicine.

Just recently, ACLM released a 10-part series of research white papers on the benefits of a whole-food, plant-predominant dietary lifestyle for treatment of multiple chronic conditions. The unique food-as-medicine collection is an evidence-based compilation resource for medical professionals treating patients with chronic diseases.

Each paper in the series provides a comprehensive evidence guide on the state of research in the field to support further learning, discussions with colleagues, and provider-to-patient education. Focus areas include plant-based diets and reproductive cancers, weight management, enteral nutrition, and autoimmune disease.