

INNOVATOR Q&A

Plant Docs wants you to take fewer pills

Plant Docs, a nonprofit in Providence, is educating adults on the benefits of a vegan diet — and helping them start with an innovative program.

By [Alexa Gagosz](#) Globe Staff, Updated February 13, 2023, 6:00 a.m.



Dr. Sandra Musial is the cofounder and executive director of Plant Docs, a new educational resource in Providence to help adults change their diets. HANDOUT

A longtime physician who has specialized in nutrition, Dr. Sandra Musial has wondered why her peers were not discussing plant-based options with their patients.

She would reference [The China Study](#), which looked at how consuming whole, plant-based foods can dramatically decrease a patient's risk of cancer, diabetes, and heart disease. In many instances, Musial found, medication wasn't always the answer.

In 2021, Musial left her job at Hasbro Children's Hospital and cofounded [Plant Docs](#) with Dr. Suyin Lee and Dr. Steven Stein. The nonprofit, which is based in the cellar of Plant City in Providence, helps educate people how going vegan can prevent — and sometimes even reverse — chronic diseases.

How does Plant Docs work?

Musial: We're a monthlong program that helps prevent and reverse chronic disease through a whole food and plant-based lifestyle. During that month, we offer four sessions that go into plant-based nutrition education, menu planning, reading labels, and cooking classes. To show everyone how their changes are working in the class, we do take everyone's pre- and post-program blood work, weight, and blood pressure checks.

What data do you have that shows this program works?

Our research supports that changing to plant-based nutrition can improve your weight, type 2 diabetes, heart disease, inflammation, sexual function, energy, bowel function, and auto-immune disorders. We have found that those who participate in the program lose an average of 4 pounds in one month. Those with a BMI of 30 or more lose an average of 5 pounds over the month. That's healthy — you don't want people to lose 15 pounds at once and then binge eat and gain it all back. But we've also found that people's total cholesterol decreases by 25 mg/dL on average over the month.

Why don't more physicians talk about plant-based diets as an option?

In the past, nutrition really hasn't been discussed in great detail in medical schools. A lot of patients who come to me say they were given the option to go on medication or the doctor might say they should look into changing their "diet" but don't give them any tips on how they could start that process.

Are your programs covered under insurance?

We would really like to work toward it being covered. We truly think this should be offered as an option to help educate the public on plant-based diets. The answer isn't always medication, which can have side effects and not everyone wants to take them. We are also waiting for our 501(c)(3) status to go through, which will allow us to apply for grants to help expand programs.

As of right now, the cost of the [monthlong program] is \$250 for one person.

What challenges do you face right now?

I've spent a lot of time trying to build Plant Docs and running classes and I never really had time to do the outreach to physicians. I think educating the medical students, doctors, doing visits to different physician offices and letting them know we exist for their patients is a better place for where my time could be spent.