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EDITORIAL

The Biological, Social and Environmental Dimensions of Nutrition

This issue is privileged to include a guest article by Professor Mark Wahlqvist, President of the International Union of Nutritional Sciences 2000-2005, on the Role of International Nutrition Science in Human Development and Planetary Health. The article is re-produced with the kind permission of the author and the editor of the Nutriview. Its central messages are elaborated here as timely reminders to us in the field of food and nutrition science.

In the appeal for “…nutrition science to be less anthropocentric and more mindful of ecosystems, their evolution and integrity, particularly in regard to the future food supply and healthful environments”, we are reminded of the paramount importance for conservation and sustenance of our resources and the health of the biosphere. Much of the world’s living and physical resources are being channeled into technological growth and material expansion. The consequent utilization and exploitation of resources at an accelerating pace has led to significant depletion of non-renewable energy and enormous generation of wastes, all of which are detrimental to human and environmental health.

How has nutrition science lived up to the challenges of the rapid technological and environmental changes in the past 150 years? At a plenary session on New Nutrition Science at the IUNS 18th International Congress of Nutrition held in Durban, South Africa on 19-23 September 2005, it was argued that the practice of nutrition science has not evolved effectively and fast enough on international and national policy towards supporting sustainable ecosystems and healthy environments. While it was acknowledged that great success has been achieved in nutrition science based on the "classical" life science approach grounded in physiology and biochemistry, there were fervent calls for its expansion to embrace other domains such as evolution, ecology, economics, equity and ethics.

The proponents of the New Nutrition Science reiterated the importance for nutrition to remain a biological science. Nonetheless, they articulated for the need to open up the framework of nutrition and shifting the science from one centered on humans to one centered on the ecosphere of which humans are a part” (McMichael, 2005). Lang (2005) further delineated these two paradigms as one being “biologically reductionist and with an interest in nutrients as key factors in individually determined health”, and the other “rooted in social reform and a more classical conception of public health, in which amelioration of diet, health and supply chains have to be introduced on a population-wide rather than individualized basis”.

Whilst it is apt for food and nutrition scientists to be concerned with production and consumption, we should also direct concerns for the capacity of the food-producing systems to remain productive. We should join other scientists in being concerned with climate changes, biodiversity losses, land degradation, water shortages, fisheries exhaustion, and rural/farming-urban migration as we move into the new era of preservation and sustenance of global resources.
The necessity to integrate biological, social and environmental determinants at the global, national and community levels is crucial in addressing nutrition problems. This is well exemplified by the spiraling rise of obesity and diabetes, and the re-emergence of infectious diseases such as tuberculosis and malaria. Understanding the genomics and biology of these problems is essential but insufficient to prevent their spread. Understanding their underlying social and environmental dimensions is equally vital. Thus, whether our investigation is in the laboratory setting or the community, we should be heedful of the “big picture” perspective that includes ethical, economic, ecological and other implications.

In conclusion, key features from the Giessen Declaration (2005) are depicted below for the reflection of all:

“The purpose of nutrition science is to contribute to a world in which present and future generations fulfil their human potential, live in the best of health, and develop, sustain and enjoy an increasingly diverse human, living and physical environment”.

“The imperative is for nutritionists to embrace social and environmental science, follow ethical and ecological principles, respect tradition and culture, affirm human rights, and be committed to the creation and maintenance of politics and programmes designed to preserve and protect the human, living and physical world all together”.


Khor Geok Lin
Universiti Putra Malaysia
2005
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Upcoming Conferences

2006

Bioavailability 2006
7-10 March, Chiang Mai, Thailand
Inquiries: www.inmu.mahidol.ac.th/bio_2006

21st Scientific Conference of the Nutrition Society of Malaysia,
30-31 March 2006, Kuala Lumpur
Contact: president@nutriweb.org.my

4th Asian Congress of Dietetics
Nutrition and Dietetics in a Borderless Society
23-26 April, Manila, Philippines
Contact: ndap@1-next.net

International Conference on Nutrigenomics & Gut Health
30 April, 1-3 May 2006
Enquiries: www.nutrigenomics.org.nz

International Conference on Exploring new Frontiers in Medicine and Health
1-2 August, Kuala Lumpur
Inquiries: www.medic.upm.edu.my/conference

10th International Congress of Obesity
3-8 September, Sydney, Australia
Contact: enquiries@ico2006.com

17th IUFost 13th World Congress of Food Science and Technology
17-21 September, Nantes, France
Contact: iufost@nantes.inra.fr

1st World Congress of Public Health Nutrition
28-30 September, Barcelona, Spain
Inquiries: www.nutrition2006.com

Joint 8th IUNS-International Symposium on Clinical Nutrition and 5th Asia Pacific Society of Clinical Nutrition Conference
14-17 October, Hangzhou, China
Contact: http://www.2006iccn.org

The 14th International Conference on Eating Disorders
19-21 October, Alpbach, Austria
Contact: info@netswerk-essstoerungen.at

2007

3rd International Conference on Traditional Mediterranean Diet
25-26 March, Athens, Greece
Inquiries: mediet@heliotopos.net

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9-11 May, Malta.
Contact: functional.sympo2007@ilsieurope.be