

Editorial

This is the first issue of 2002, the journal's fifth year. We want to reaffirm our ambition in Public Health Nutrition to make sure we keep focused on addressing the big issues and trying to keep in focus that our purpose (or at least I feel this is my purpose) is to help make things better for those who are worst off, wherever they be. I do not claim that every paper included in our journal will present world shattering news, but I do hope that each paper will contribute in some way to improving our understanding.

Some find methodological papers a bit boring, but unless we understand how the measures we use work, how they provide information for us to work on, we may waste a lot of time. We need to be aware of the errors that weaken or distort the associations we find in our nutrition-health explorations. Many measures used in epidemiological studies have considerable error, but this does not mean that we should not use these measures, we can not simply stop all work until we have the perfect measure, we just need to be aware of the weaknesses in the approaches we use and draw conclusions cautiously. But conclusions we must draw- we must help policy makers to decide what to do- if we don't, others who know less about our area of work will. As uncomfortable as it may seem we can no longer sit on the side lines and complain about what others are doing wrong- we have to engage in the debate and bring our scientific understanding to bear on the problems that face us in our own society and the wider world. Public Health Nutrition must be about how to apply our knowledge to improve the health and well being of our communities. The evidence will never be perfect, and we need to acknowledge that, but I feel we must not shirk our collective social responsibilities, and we must engage in the messy world of applying our knowledge to action.

We need to make sure that programmes that are designed to improve health are evaluated for effectiveness.

It is becoming increasingly clear that in order to implement a Public Health Nutrition approach we need to ensure that we have enough people working in this area with the right skills. Understanding how methodological issues affect our ability to draw conclusions and apply or work to finding solutions is critical, and should be included in our education and training programmes. There is a clear link between training, education, service, and research; all need skilled people- the skills may differ, but people in each area of work need to know and understand the role and contribution that the others make to their area. That is, we all need to see the context within which the small piece we contribute fits into the bigger picture, that ultimately should lead to improvements in nutrition related health. In this issue of the journal we have an announcement that calls for contributions that:

- Enumerate and profile the public health nutrition workforce and its practices
- Assess workforce competency and continuing professional development needs
- Describe and evaluate workforce development strategies, including training, and
- Provide evidence that public health nutrition workforce development improves health outcomes.

We hope to bring these papers together in an issue later this year.

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Editor-in-chief