

Letter to the editor

The paper entitled 'Curriculum design for professional development in public health nutrition in Britain' by Landman *et al.*¹ in the first issue of *Public Health Nutrition* provided an interesting summary of the development of public health nutrition (PHN) as a discrete but interrelated field of practice in Britain. We wish to point out that many of the issues raised in this paper have currency in Australia, where the debate about delineation and definition of PHN continues, in part stimulated by a discussion paper on a definition and a conceptual framework for PHN and community nutrition we published in the *Australian Journal of Nutrition and Dietetics* in early 1997². The debate in Australia (as we interpret it) has evolved from initial disagreement about the definition of PHN and how it differs from dietetics, towards discussion on the need for competencies in this field³⁻⁵.

Whilst we are quick to point out that our views do not formally represent those of any professional association or body, we dare to reinforce the following points about the development of PHN as a professional field of practice, with currency in most countries, including Australia.

- PHN is a multidisciplinary field of practice and no one professional group has all the skills required.
- Competencies for PHN are required as a basis for curriculum design, quality in education and training, and as a guide to specialization.
- Competencies must correspond to the contemporary and predicted needs of society.

- The attainment of these competencies may be reached by many routes.
- PHN is both art and science. We fully support the view that creativity in PHN is required.

Some may argue that debate about PHN definitions and competencies makes for dry reading in this exciting new journal. We argue that communication about work force and infrastructure issues will contribute significantly to the impact this journal can make to PHN internationally. We believe that there is a case for inter-country transfer of definitions, competencies and other work force issues in PHN, and that *Public Health Nutrition* can be a vehicle for this discourse.

References

- 1 Landman *et al.* Curriculum design for professional development in public health nutrition in Britain. *Publ. Health Nutr.* 1998; **1**: 69-74.
- 2 Hughes R, Somerset S. Definitions and conceptual frameworks for public health and community nutrition. *Aust. J. Nutr. Dietet.* 1996; **54**: 40-5.
- 3 Ash S, Tapsell L, Yeatman H. Letters to the editor. *Aust. J. Nutr. Dietet.* 1997; **54**: 152-6.
- 4 Niall M, O'Dea K. Letter to the editor. *Aust. J. Nutr. Dietet.* 1997; **54**: 208.
- 5 Mackerras D. Letter to the editor. *Aust. J. Nutr. Dietet.* 1998; **55**: 37-9.

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