

## Book Reviews

Wilma B. Freire (editor). *Nutrition and an Active Life: From Knowledge to Action*. Scientific and Technical Publication No. 612. Washington, DC: Pan American Health Organization, 2005. US\$ 36.00 (paperback), pp. 260. ISBN: 92 75 11612 1

*Nutrition and an Active Life: From Knowledge to Action* is an assembly of significant nutrition-based research, mainly within the Pan-America region, that involves encouraging healthy, active lifestyles. The contributors to this book, who are leading public health experts, have focused on how exposure variables can affect the nutritional and health outcomes of a population under investigation. These outcomes have been effectively translated into action by health professionals in the development of public policy and in the planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of programmes for improving public health.

This book features various themes. The theme on the ‘Contribution of science to action’ reviews the contributions to policies and programmes of a collection of studies unique in the history of child nutrition research in the world, the Institute of Nutrition of Central America and Panama longitudinal and follow-up studies. These contributions have provided fuel for advocacy for those interested in convincing policy-makers to invest in maternal and child nutrition, and also inform programme managers about how best to design nutritional interventions. Although there is still much room for improvement, particularly regarding the duration of exclusive breast-feeding, this theme has been successfully presented here according to logically collated topics.

The theme on ‘Micronutrients: successful interventions for the correction of specific deficiencies’ covers several major areas of deficiency. This section reveals the recommended steps for successfully eradicating iodine-deficiency disorders, which can serve as the foundation for promoting micronutrient fortification programmes in both the Americas and other regions of the world. Attempts to control vitamin A deficiency highlight how a sustained impact is best achieved through a conjunction of multiple interventions undertaken sequentially, rather than a ‘single-bullet’ approach. An overview of the key issues related to the role of folate in human metabolic processes is presented, as are the current strategies being utilised to prevent neural tube defects and their effectiveness. These considerations are followed by a description of implementing the mandatory folic acid fortification of wheat flour, which could serve as a case study for other countries.

The theme on ‘Integrated strategies at the local level’ focuses on the evolution of breast-feeding programmes in protecting and improving integral maternal and child health, and also explores how the formulation of policies and interventions may be adapted within national and community frameworks. The theme demonstrates that any new improvements in providing nutrition information to consumers will

necessitate changes in food-labelling requirements that include detailed information on food-group composition. The Agita Sao Paulo Program is presented as a prototype of a successful model of intervention for promoting physical activity, especially in developing countries.

The theme on ‘Integrated strategies at the national level’ presents an account of how the principles of strategic mission-based research have generated useful knowledge that has an impact on the definition of public health nutrition policies and programmes, and on changes to current policies and programmes. The theme highlights the fact that, in order to meet the current challenge, more intense social action will be required, bolstered by political support, skilled and conscientious human resources, and regulations that are supportive and facilitate the establishment of the strategy as a priority state policy to take effect throughout the country. The broader scope in the field of urban planning policies is also discussed, which could prove to be vital, especially now that the WHO has placed among its highest priorities the adoption of population-wide, preventive-based strategy to combat the global epidemic of non-communicable diseases.

The message conveyed by the book is that the community of public health professionals can play an important leadership role in promoting priority actions in all of the identified areas by showing the magnitude and health consequences of a sedentary lifestyle and its relationship to urban development choices, advocating public policies that favour physical activity and the highest possible quality of life for all sectors of urban residents, and monitoring population changes with regard to physical activity level and overall health status.

This book provides a very useful resource for practitioners, researchers, nutritionists, dietitians, food scientists, public health workers, decision-makers in the fields of health promotion, community education and policy-makers in government, other related professionals who will realise that this is an excellent reference book.

This is an excellent book to introduce health professionals to the programme-planning, policy, resource and nutrition issues specific to community nutrition, particularly in developing countries, providing an understanding of the creation and implementation of nutrition programmes from various perspectives that may be adapted within national and community frameworks.

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