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Book Review

J. Mann & A. S. Truswell (editors). *Essentials of Human Nutrition*. Oxford: Oxford University Press 2007. £35.99 (paperback), pp. 599. ISBN 978-0-19-929097-0.

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Essentials of Human Nutrition is the third edition of this excellent text originally published in 1998. This comprehensively updated version contains many chapters that have been completely rewritten since the last volume in 2002, while the others have been meticulously revised. The content is presented in a readily accessible manner and addresses the issues of greatest pertinence to contemporary nutritional science and therapeutics, with sections covering foods, macro- and micronutrients, nutrition-related disorders, public health nutrition and clinical nutrition. Eminent researchers and teachers from around the world have been commissioned to write these specialist chapters, with the judicious editorial style permitting elaboration of key issues within the premise of a general nutrition text. The engagement of these experts has generated an insightful volume that addresses a broad subject matter in a truly global context.

As well as the core issues under review, many of the authors also refer to the legislative and policy context at local, national and regional levels, elements that have a significant bearing on the food choices and behaviours of individuals and populations and ones for which even novices in the field need to develop an early appreciation. The considered inclusion of chapters devoted to the challenges of the chronic disease epidemic and to the ageing of the population provides an anticipatory pretext for nutritional issues of profound and developing importance in the public health domain.

The more technical chapters achieve that elusive quality of making the complex appear simple. For instance, the oncology section elucidates the molecular pathogenesis of cancer using straightforward paradigms that illustrate the sequential nature of this process. The nutritional and other factors that modulate cancer risk are also summarised in table form, affording readers an instant insight into many of the issues of key relevance in this area. The technical terms that are necessarily included are clearly explained in plain language, a format that less experienced readers will appreciate and one that is adhered to throughout the text. Like the oncology chapter, the individual micronutrient chapters are generously illustrated with explanatory schematics and diagrams that complement the text. These chapters are also noteworthy for the inclusion of laboratory investigations of status, nutrient–nutrient interactions and drug–nutrient interactions, details often omitted from general nutrition texts. The life cycle chapters discuss the physiological changes in nutritional requirements that arise from pre-conception to old age.

The public health nutrition chapters are thoughtfully formulated to explore the diverse range of issues at hand. The food poverty section, for example, is composed to embrace the panoply of structural, ecological, biological, behavioural and economic factors that mediate poor nutritional status and ill health in this increasingly recognised high-risk group. The main concepts of the chapter are elegantly illuminated by quotations that forcefully convey the lived experience of food poverty and food insecurity in developed countries, with the use of case studies further illustrating these themes. The obesity chapter is similarly comprehensive, encompassing the epidemiology, aetiology, clinical sequelae and management of the condition, as well as forwarding effective measures for prevention at the ecological level. The myriad forces that impact upon food-related behaviour in the context of chronic disease are elucidated in a chapter that adroitly covers the significant obstacles to health-driven food policy that prevail in many countries.

The methodological sections are also composed with clarity and coherence, such that the reader becomes conversant with not just the theoretical concepts at hand, but also with the pragmatic limitations and practical issues that govern nutritional research.

In keeping with the fundamental precept of a general nutrition text, the editors have eschewed the heavy style of a meticulously referenced volume, favouring instead the judicious citation of core references at the end of each chapter, many of which are provided as web links on the online resource that accompanies the book. This format adds considerably to the accessibility of the text for the general reader, while still satisfying the needs of those with more specific requirements.

Overall, this is a comprehensive but eminently readable book, which will provide an ideal companion for students of nutritional science and its affiliated healthcare disciplines. Its competitive price represents excellent value for money, further reason why I shall be recommending it highly to both my postgraduate and particularly my undergraduate students of nutrition and dietetics.

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