

Guest Editorial Inauguration



This special issue of *Public Health Nutrition* is a first fruit of an International Union of Nutritional Sciences (IUNS) initiative. The task for all of us involved in *The New Nutrition Science project* has been of unique importance and relevance in my time as IUNS President. The task been to preserve all that is basic and vital in 'classic' nutrition science, and at the same time to formulate a new definition, new goals and a new conceptual framework for a science fully equipped to meet the challenges and the opportunities of the world in which we now live, in this new century. This I believe to be the most urgent and exciting task now facing our profession.

This task consolidated in 2001 at the time of the 17th International Congress of Nutrition in Vienna, and has been progressed in many international meetings since that time. The project has brought together leaders in the field of nutrition as presently conceived – as principally a biological science – together with scholars and other experts inside and outside the academic community with special knowledge of food and nutrition. Some of these are authors of the papers published here. Some were participants in a workshop at the Schloss Rauischholzhausen in Giessen, Germany, held in April this year. The setting of Giessen was of special symbolic importance: it was there that Justus von Liebig developed nutrition as a biochemical science in the mid-nineteenth century, according to principles and responding to priorities very different from those of the present and future world.

The Giessen Declaration, published on pp. 783–786, records the unanimous agreement of the participants at the workshop that now is the time to define and to practice nutrition as a biological and also a social and environmental science, with all this implies. This is the beginning of a new era for our science, with its application to food and nutrition policy.

A new era for all the sciences

The new nutrition science has a context of a new world for all of the sciences, which themselves are on the threshold of momentous change. First, the level of enquiry is becoming at once more infinitesimal (with attotechnology, beyond the 'nano', already upon us) and yet also infinite (even the ultimate measure of time, the light-year, has been challenged by the stopping and starting of light). This will transform our concept of ourselves, of the planet on which we live, of things now referred to as either animate or inanimate, and of our systems of values and ethics^{1–4}.

Second, science is becoming more integrative and less dependent on reductionism. There will be more partnerships both within the sciences and also beyond science, with other types of knowledge creation and management. This will enable new understanding of the human condition. I believe too, that this will create opportunities effectively to address and resolve apparently intransigent problems, like the nexus between poverty and hunger, and nutrition-related susceptibility to disease.

Third, science will be required to acknowledge its social responsibility and its duty to work and act in the best interests of all people, and of the planet as a whole.

There will be many surprises and uncertainties: this is the nature of science. But the process of scientific enquiry should continue to build societal, professional and individual capacity to make innovative, logical and transparent contributions to a sustainable and ethical future.

A new era for nutrition science

What does this mean for nutrition science and for us who profess it? The science will become increasingly exciting, as we understand more about the links between what and how we eat and our well-being and health in all their many aspects.

There will be new conjunctions between the food and nutrition sciences, as they have been conceived, and the cosmological and earth sciences, the geographical and social sciences, and the behavioural, engineering, telecommunication and other sciences. This will require imaginative and pluralistic training and practice. I believe that through such processes nutrition science will become more relevant and more prominent, and gain greater public profile and responsibility.

To this end, this special issue of *Public Health Nutrition* is published on the occasion of the 18th International Congress of Nutrition held in Durban, South Africa, in a partnership between IUNS and the World Health Policy Forum.

As we, the new nutrition scientists, seize this moment of scientific confluence and popularise it, we will reveal and amplify the gains for planetary health and human development beyond our expectations. By engaging with social and environmental issues not as peripheral but as central to our work, we will be better able to help build a world in which foods in amounts and with the nutritional quality appropriate to our social, emotional,

physical and basic biological needs will be available and affordable in a sustainable and equitable way.

The IUNS, with its constituent regional and national bodies, could develop criteria for the conduct and application of the new nutrition science in accredited centres of excellence, designed to encourage and accelerate initiative and innovation. Further, the IUNS is a constituent part of the ICSU (International Council for the Sciences); and so our union can be a key player and partner in the whole process of the revitalisation not only of nutrition science, but also of all allied sciences, in the interests of the human and all other species and of the future of the planet.

Indeed, ICSU has already begun an initiative, 'The Sciences for Health and Well-Being', chaired by the IUNS President. In addition, a coalition of all the relevant scientific disciplines assembled by ICSU is examining the whole issue of the sustainability of food systems. Such ICSU initiatives will contribute to and support the new nutrition science.

My own family originated in Europe and also in Asia and in particular China, whose civilisations predate those of Europe; and I am a citizen of Australia, one great country whose culture now reconciles indigenous and immigrant

traditions. The family of my successor as IUNS President, Ricardo Uauy, a Chilean citizen, originated in the eastern Mediterranean, the fount of the most ancient European food systems, and his present connections are in both Latin America and Europe. The 18th International Congress of Nutrition is the first to be held in the African continent, where, after all, the journey of *Homo sapiens sapiens* began. All in all, this is a uniquely auspicious time in which to inaugurate the new nutrition science.

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