

Book reviews

Oral Health. Diet and Other Factors. Report of the British Nutrition Foundation Task Force, 1998. Ursula Arens (editor). Elsevier. \$140.00. ISBN 0-444-50025-1

This is a compilation of seventeen chapters, most of which are attributed to individual members of a British Nutrition Foundation (BNF) Task Force, although the report implies that the final version of the chapters are the collective work of all the members. The Task Force consisted of nine members and a chairman, drawn from a variety of backgrounds, mostly academic, but some Emeritus and at least one with commercial connections. So this should provide a good mixture for tackling the terms of reference, which are listed as reviewing the relationship of diet and nutrition to oral health, preparing a report on this, making recommendations and identifying areas for future research. The cost is quite high, at US \$140 for a slim volume of less than 150 pages, so it will probably be bought mainly by libraries and institutions.

The Chairman in his preface emphasizes that these 'Task Forces' operate completely independently of the BNF, but it is not made clear why oral health was singled out as an appropriate topic for this report, except for the explanation that the Council of the BNF decided that the subject was 'still of sufficient interest' for the Task Force to be convened. The time-scale of the project is not given, but it would be illuminating to learn when it was initiated.

The chapters are mostly reasonably short and succinct, in a style which should appeal to readers with limited time. I think the report will be of more value to those with a nutritional background than to those already familiar with the oral research field. The first two chapters do not deal with dietary or nutritional factors, but are concerned with the structures of the mouth and the oral microflora, classifying some of the many different types of micro-organisms that inhabit the mouth.

Then follow fifteen chapters of varying quality and usefulness on different aspects of nutrition and oral health. Some are up-to-date and should provide a valuable source of references for those interested in the field while others, it has to be said, do not cover the field completely and would benefit by updating. In reviews of this nature it is always difficult to decide whether to append the relevant references at the end of each chapter or to collect them all together at the end. In this instance they have all been put on fifteen pages near the end, which increases the length of time it takes the reader to refer to them from the individual chapters. Preceding this list of references is a feature that should be helpful to nutritionists and others not familiar with some of the terms commonly used in dentistry and dental research, in the form of a three-page glossary.

A slight inconvenience is that on page ix the titles of the chapters are given but no page numbers, and for these you have to refer back to an earlier page. The following text

gives the chapter numbers only on the first page of each chapter, and the headings at the top of the right-hand pages change within the chapters, so I found it was sometimes difficult to establish exactly which section I had opened the report at and to find the areas I was looking for.

The chapters vary in depth. Some give comprehensive and useful reviews, but others in my opinion do not deal adequately with all the issues. For example the one on tooth wear is less than three pages long, in spite of the very great interest that is currently being shown in this subject and the publication of the proceedings of at least three major conferences on it that have been held in recent years. The shortness of some of the other chapters may reflect the limited information that is available to us on the connection between nutrition and certain aspects of oral health.

The text concludes with a short chapter not included on page ix, headed 'General Conclusions and Recommendation'. This mentions the contentious classification of sugars (aetiological agents in the development of dental caries) as either extrinsic or intrinsic, summarizes some of what is known about the influence of nutrition on various oral disorders, and then gives the Task Force's recommendations to individuals, health authorities, government, industry, teachers, and healthcare and dental professionals. Some of these are very brief and surely too general to be of any real use, but on the other hand it was probably a major objective of this book to encapsulate our present knowledge in order to assist these groups, and to draw the Task Force's recommendations to their attention.

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Modern Nutrition in Health and Disease, 9th edition. M. E. Shils, J. A. Olsen, M. Shike and A. C. Ross (editors). 1999. Baltimore: Williams & Wilkins. \$105.00. ISBN 0-683-30769-X

This classic text has a pedigree that stretches back over more than half a century, and Wohl and Goodhart's first edition of a text with the current title made its debut in 1955. The ninth edition is a massive tome that contains over 2000 pages split into 115 chapters and with 200 pages of appendices and no less than 169 contributing authors. It is described on the cover as two volumes of information in one handy volume but the 'handy volume' weighs in at over 3 kg! Its sheer weight and lack of portability might restrict its usefulness, especially for students.

This is a 'must have' reference work for academic libraries. At \$105, I also consider it to be very good value for money and it is cheap enough to recommend as a valuable addition to the bookshelf of any academic or practitioner working in nutrition or any student majoring in nutrition. The text is laid out in double columns and there