

Book review

Handbook of Nutrition and Diet. Babasahab B. Desai. New York: Marcel Dekker Inc. 2000. Hardback, \$195. pp. 797. ISBN 0-8247-0375-8

This book is divided into four sections. The first section, 'Food nutrients and their functions', consists of an introduction followed by chapters on various dietary nutrients. Section two, 'Foods from producers to consumers', contains a diverse number of chapters which focus on health and dietetic food, foods of plant and animal origin, potential proteins, fats and oils, food processing, preservation and food additives, food labelling and quality assurance, food safety, food transportation, storage and marketing. Section three, 'Food consumption and utilization', deals with topics such as adequacy of diet, processes of digestion, absorption, metabolism and excretion, hormonal regulation of food intake, nutrient evaluation, and dietary allowances. The final section, 'Nutritional management of diseases', contains the bulk of the text and begins with an introduction to 'Diet therapy and clinical nutrition'. Following this the nutritional management of numerous pathophysiological conditions including heart disease, cancer, obesity and diabetes, gastrointestinal disorders and diseases of the bone, hair, liver and kidneys, nervous system, and inherited metabolic disorders are dealt with. Also included in this section are chapters discussing the potential role of nutrition in the management of underweight babies, alcoholism, mental health. The text ends with a chapter entitled 'Human dietetics and health: an integrated approach'.

In the preface Professor Desai states that the aim of this text 'is to present comprehensive principles of nutrition, food science and technology, and diet and human health'. However, as I read through the text I quickly began to have serious misgivings as to the worth of this text as 'a standard book' for students and professionals with an interest in nutrition. Throughout the text many statements made by the author are not supported by scientific evidence. This might be at best irritating, but at worst could be misleading. For example, in chapter 9, 'Health and dietetic foods', the author makes the unsubstantiated and rather lame statement 'pickled foods should be eaten in small quantities'. Within the same chapter many plants and their 'actions' are given, but these actions are cited as fact rather than evidenced using reference to scientific literature.

Numerous abbreviations used in the text were never explained. For instance in chapter 14, 'Food additives and nutrification', the abbreviations GRAS and NACNE are used without fuller explanation of these terms. Surely such an approach would little help 'the needs of students' who use this text!

This book appears to rely heavily on material from the nutrition text, *Human Nutrition and Dietetics*, by Garrow *et al.* (1993). Within chapter 2, 'Water', the content and wording of the text in parts (for example, under the heading 'Water balance and electrolyte balance') is very similar to that of Garrow *et al.* (1993). In chapter 30, 'Diet and inherited metabolic disorders', the heading used and content (such as the topics 'Homocystinuria' and 'Tyrosinemia type I') are again extraordinarily similar. The absence of more topical issues within nutritional sciences, such as the potential associations between folate status and risk of vascular disease or cancer, or discussion of recent drug developments for obesity (e.g. orlistat), recent developments in leptin research, or the Barker hypothesis, is also disconcerting. Chapter headings and subheadings were at times unhelpful and in some parts made little logical sense. For example, chapter 16, 'Food safety', featured a section on 'Lactose intolerance' and chapter 31, 'Dietary management of underweight babies', discussed at length the effects of caffeine on pregnancy outcome within a subsection on 'Vitamins and nutritional management of low body weight infants'. Taken together with the numerous irritating grammatical errors that are scattered throughout the text, this made for a disappointing read.

Finally, I found the index to this textbook both unhelpful and illogical. To access information on 'type II diabetes' the reader is re-directed to 'non-insulin dependent diabetes mellitus' from where they are further re-directed to 'Diet, obesity and diabetes'. 'Selenium' (and other trace elements) appears under 'Minerals' and not as an entity on its own. Terms such as 'Pregnancy' or 'Lactation' do not feature at all, and over one-third of the index is sub-referenced under 'Diet'! Priced at \$195 this book, in my opinion, is an expensive book which falls very short of the comprehensive text of nutrition and diet it aims to be and as such this is one text that will definitely not appear on my reading list!

Alison M. Gallagher

DOI: 10.1079/BJN2001400