

Book Review

Nutrition: A Handbook For Community Nurses. J. Buttriss, A. Wayne and S. Stanner. London: Whurr. 2001. pp. 218 £18.50 ISBN: 1 86156 216 0

This book combines the scientific principles of nutrition with practical aspects of what I would call 'field nutrition'. It is good to see that the terminology relating to dietary reference values is explained very early on in chapter 1 to ensure that those practitioners unfamiliar with the terminology can quickly update themselves. The authors must also be congratulated for including estimated average requirements for energy, and reference nutrient intakes and lower reference nutrient intakes for vitamins and minerals at the beginning of the book to ensure that there is a clear reference point. Very often these reference tables are seen in appendices, which may suggest that they are less important. This might appear a simple and less important point. It is my belief, however, that after reading chapter 1 (A healthy diet), I hope that readers will check these values as they read the rest of the book and start asking appropriate questions about both their own diet and that of their clients. Quite appropriately, this chapter addresses the issues relating to components of a healthy diet, food processing, nutritional labelling and explains the concept of functional foods.

Although sub-headings are present, what I particularly like about the book is that the authors have tried to anticipate some questions the reader might like to be answered. This, I think, helps the reader to focus on the issue under discussion and in question. In addition I find the cross-referencing of questions between chapters very useful and I think this will help readers to relate issues. The authors have gone to great length to adopt less scientific jargon and user-friendly language, but at the same time maintain the nutritional message in a non-patronising but professional language. I have a strong feeling that practitioners will like this approach.

Chapter 2 is very quick to get through and the issues of nutrients and health relating to fibre, sugar and fat are discussed. In addition, information on other nutrients and phytochemicals is given. It is good to see that chapter 3 (Nutrition through life) is the longest and that the social aspects of nutrition are addressed. In the field, a lot of work needs to go into this area. The book discusses pre-conceptual and pregnancy nutrition very well and goes some way to respond to some of the questions asked by parents and practitioners alike on nutrition during the formative pre-school, primary school and teenager years. For example: 'many teenagers are adopting a vegetarian style of eating, are there associated problems?' and 'Is

consistent snacking (grazing) bad for growing children?' are two of the many questions asked. In this same chapter, the book addresses issues of nutrition and men (the neglected sex), the menopause and of ethnic minority groups. Chapter 3 concludes with the main concerns about health and the potential health problems that include dental health, bone health, constipation, anaemia, diabetes, and being overweight and underweight.

The associations, between diet, lifestyle and some diseases are discussed in chapter 4. Many of the common conditions mentioned in chapter 3 are explored further in this chapter. Chapter 5 address issues in the media that are both ongoing and very new, such as dieting, weight loss, women's issues and functional foods. In addition, protective substances such as flavonoids, phyto-oestrogens and lycopene are examined as well as their impact on health. Topical issues such as genetically-modified foods and organic foods are also discussed, whilst a small section deals with irritable bowel syndrome. I feel here that some acknowledgement of the work of the Irritable Bowel Syndrome Network should be highlighted.

For the 'doubting Thomases' on some of the published work, chapter 6 provides guidance on assessing reliability and validity of some scientific papers. Some helpful questions to ask are included, whilst brief but useful explanations are given. However, the reader will need to read elsewhere for more detailed explanations about some of the issues mentioned in this book.

What is missing? Nutritional support, supplementation and replacement are increasingly becoming very important in the community. While this is a large area, I think a chapter addressing aspects of home enteral and parenteral nutrition would have given the book another string to its bow and added impetus. That apart, I feel the book will be a useful tool, at various levels, to many community nurse practitioners as a reference point. In addition, the book will function well as a reference textbook to nursing and midwifery students as well as educators.

This apart, the book does exactly what the authors say it should do in the introduction on p. 7. The authors state: 'this book has been written to provide community nurses with basic and topical practical information on various aspects of nutrition, to help in the provision of comprehensive dietary advice and information'. I feel the authors have succeeded in doing just that and they must be congratulated.

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