

Editorial

Nutrition Foundations in the Asia Pacific Region

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The involvement of non-government organisations (NGOs), which are not-for-profit, in scientifically-based nutrition education can be of great national and international benefit to community health. Other agencies are, of course, involved in this pursuit, namely governmental, education institutional, food industry and agricultural commodity groups. But the externalisation or "out-housing" of nutrition education to an NGO can provide not only greater credibility, but also participation of others at the community and professional levels.

Some notable examples of Nutrition Foundations have been the British Nutrition Foundation (BNF), the Nutrition Foundation in the USA, with its publication of "Nutrition Reviews" (now managed by ILSI, the International Life Sciences Institute), the Australian Nutrition Foundation (ANF), the Nutrition Foundation of India (NFI), the Nutrition Foundation of the Philippines (PNF) and those in Italy, New Zealand and elsewhere. Whilst community nutrition education has been a common theme in these organisations, the level at which it is pitched varies from that of "agents of change" like health care professionals, food technologists and food and nutrition policy makers, to an interested and educated lay audience. Because of cost, Nutrition Foundations can rarely engage in media campaigns, but may do so when access is provided by way of community service. Their spokespersons can take advantage of these opportunities – and, in the recent report of the ANF¹, more need to do this was felt necessary by its membership, and in a more proactive than reactive way. The problem is to do this scientifically well. It does appear that, in an information-rich age ahead, informed debate, with intelligent appreciation of the need to make healthful food and lifestyle choices in the face of uncertainty, will itself be an objective of Nutrition Foundations². The

Internet will facilitate this process and, it can be expected, Nutrition Foundations will interact through their own Home Pages in the public interest (<http://www.monash.edu.au/ANF>).

Some Nutrition Foundations also fund research, especially as it relates to community nutrition education needs. In the case of the ANF, it has, until recently, left this to other organisations, be they governmental, philanthropic, disease-specific foundations (like those dealing with heart disease, diabetes or kidney disease) or industry. But this is changing, as a network of members, especially in the education sector, see opportunities for community-directed, low-cost, Internet-based research.

Roles of Nutrition Foundations extend to those of cross-disciplinary liaison in the food and nutrition sciences and technologies and advocacy in relation to food and nutrition policy.

There is a great opportunity for a network of Nutrition Foundations to develop in the Asia-Pacific region. There is also an imperative for this in a part of the world where economic progress is rapid, eco-systems for food production are under pressure, educational standards are advancing, health care systems improving and costing more, and where communication technology is becoming more sophisticated.

References

1. Natalie E Beaumont-Smith and Mark L Wahlqvist, The future for the Australian Nutrition Foundation: A survey assessing members' nutrition information needs. *Asia Pacific J Clin Nutr*, 5(4): 204-208. (This issue).
2. Wahlqvist ML and Briggs DR. *The Origin of Ideas, Myths and Misinformation About Food*. pp 1-9. In: *Food Questions and Answers*. Penguin books, Melbourne, 1990.