

Editorials

Food fights, food peace, love and understanding – and the role of this journal

This is the first editorial of a new era for the journal, after almost a decade of successful hardworking efforts by the Editor-in-Chief Barrie Margetts. The area of public health nutrition is evolving rapidly, with a new association being born following the First World Congress in Public Health Nutrition in Barcelona, last September.

Where are we going and what will the next decade have in store for us? Everything goes in waves. In preparation for this editorial, I listened to a brief interview with Bruce Springsteen – he is currently touring with the *Seeger Sessions*, the name of his new album. This is of course all about the songs written by Pete Seeger, and Bruce commented that: ‘This is the voice of the people – the voice of democracy!’ Many of us remember the 60s and 70s and all the changes that took place during those decades – how we were all going back to nature, the environmental movement, the peace movement (with Pete Seeger), the feminist movement, etc.

The power of the people

Breastfeeding was one nutrition issue that in the early 70s suddenly became ‘in vogue’ in Sweden – and breastfeeding rates started to climb quickly from an all-time low¹. This process was not necessarily geared or ordered by politicians or policies – this really powerful process came from the masses and was possibly powered by early adopters forming peer-support groups, some hard-working midwives, nutrition experts and the mass media actually pushing for the right thing this time. Powerful stuff.

Are the times different today? Is the public busy watching soap operas, playing golf or playing poker rather than gathering in groups discussing important stuff? Maybe we will again experience major changes originated by the people, and it is our duty to understand how we can promote mobilisation in the right direction and provide a clear and understandable evidence base for that purpose. Not very much research is aimed at identifying the success factors for such profound changes in health behaviour in large population groups, and there may be few examples. Very little attention overall is paid to the voice of the people, the need for mobilisation of the public or bottom-up approaches; rather the trend is the opposite in the most recent document following up on the Ottawa Charter².

Recently our Out of the Box columnist was criticised for being political. Food is obviously politics. Academia is

designated to progress the pillars of the academic community: research, education, information and collaboration. As an academic journal, we need to publish good research and ensure an ethical and transparent, equitable approach to the publication of good scientific papers.

We should also provide a forum for more overarching philosophical discussions on history and where we are heading. Such issues can be providing room for the discussions regarding the *New Nutrition Science* project³, discussing research fraud and how to prevent it⁴ or for the questioning of policy documents giving too little attention to the needs for funding for research and training in public health nutrition. Also possibly reminding of old policy documents that we all agreed at the time⁵, which seem to have fallen into oblivion⁶. In doing that, we need to scrutinise, criticise and point out the problems of current policy and politics. Letters to the editor, debates and views should be a distinct part of any scientific journal, also this one. As do authors, discussants will need to submit a transparency statement in order to get their letters printed. Scientists who do not contribute to the ongoing debate are seemingly not fulfilling their obligations to the tax payers – the public – who should be considered their employers, at least when employed in academia.

The duty of public health nutritionists

In most countries, available funding for public health nutrition research is sparse. A lot of our time as researchers is spent writing grant applications to funding bodies on national or international level. This exercise often means stretching and bending our research interests in accordance with the current view from decision-makers regarding research needs as reflected in the calls for proposals. A lot of time is spent on possibly futile efforts to get funding, and the important discussions of where we are heading are often lost due to lack of time and energy.

An obvious need for a ‘world watch’ emerges: an independent voice in public health nutrition, keeping track of trends for change which need to be supported or fought, reminding of promises given in the past, and providing decision-makers with high-quality professionals and an evidence-based view of the needs for research and research funding from a PUBLIC health nutrition perspective. We need to mix the voice of the people with the voice of the experts in order to reach the sweet mix of evidence-based powerful action!

May the good work performed by my predecessor never be forgotten, thank you so much to Barrie for staying on in the close circle of editors!

Agneta Yngve
Editor-in-Chief

References

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- 2 Porter C. Ottawa to Bangkok: changing health promotion discourse. *Health Promotion International* 2006 Oct 2; [Epub ahead of print].
- 3 Leitzmann C, Cannon G. Dimensions, domains and principles of the new nutrition science. *Public Health Nutrition* 2005; **8**(6A): 787–94.
- 4 Margetts B. Stopping the rot in nutrition science [Editorial]. *Public Health Nutrition* 2006; **9**(2): 169–73.
- 5 FAO/WHO. *International Conference on Nutrition, World Declaration and Plan of Action*. Rome/Geneva: FAO/WHO, 1992.
- 6 Meeting the nutrition challenge: a call to arms. *SCN News* 1997; (14): 5–7.