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Public Health Nutrition from principles to practice, M Lawrence and Worsley T, McGraw Hill, 2007 Book Review

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Public Health Nutrition from Principles to Practice Mark Lawrence and Tony Worsley, McGraw-Hill, 2007, isbn: 9780335223206

Globally, food and nutrition play a key role in many aspects of public health. In more affluent countries concerns of malnutrition and hunger have been replaced by problems of dietary imbalance and excess. In Low income countries not only is there widespread suffering caused by lack of food but as the more industrialised of these countries prosper and lifestyles change there is the added burden of nutrition-related diseases similar to more affluent countries. Besides ill health and human suffering, the social and environmental cost of the modern global food supply is also considerable. This book covers all these aspects of food and nutrition and more. Until recently few text books have devoted sufficient attention to the complexity of the food system and the impact on public health. Here however the authors have deliberately chosen to examine the moral, social and ethical issues of food production, supply and distribution and the impact on diet, nutrition and health.

This book is not only timely but innovative in that it transcends conventional discourse based on the fairly narrow and traditional biomedical paradigm to incorporate a broader more social perspective of food and health. It therefore compliments existing text books but also, in my personal opinion, succeeds in providing an excellent post-graduate text of a more socio-political and critical standing. In recent years Public Health Nutrition has emerged as an independent academic and professional discipline in its own right. Lawrence and Worsley have achieved their aim to provide a comprehensive resource for practitioners who are charged with improving the nutritional health of populations through action at the local, national and global levels.

Contributors to the book, of which there are many (over 40 and 18 referees), are predominantly Australian, Sweden, and British. Nonetheless, the approach is refreshingly global and applicable to a wide audience. It is appropriate for students of Public Health Nutrition or indeed public health in general. The book is neatly divided into four sections: principles; populations; priorities; and practice.

Part 1: Principles: serves as a useful foundation to other chapters. Here the authors capture the definition and principles underpinning public health nutrition and provide an overview of the scientific rational for action on diet and health. Useful here is the reference to international and national guidelines that inform current policy and practice in countries such as the UK, Norway and the US.

Part 2: Populations: explores population groups fro whom nutrition is particularly relevant, mothers and infants, children and adolescents, and older adults are included.

Part 3 Priorities: affords consideration to key issues within Public Health Nutrition such as undernutrition, overnutriiton, nutrition inequalities, sustainability, agri-business and the global food economy.

Part 4 Practices: This the final section provides readers with an overview of evidence-based approaches to inform practice, for example, monitoring food and nutrition situation of populations, assessment of nutritional status, project management, research skills, and promotion and communication.

In conclusion Public Health Nutrition is an essential resource for public health nutritionists, researchers and students of nutrition, dietetics and public health. For me the only shortcoming is the lack of space or attention afforded to more critical theories of food and public health. Although mentioned by some of the contributors there is a missed opportunity for introducing traditionally medically orientated students to more political and critical theories of food and health. For example the increasing contribution from interdisciplinary analysis of subjects such as obesity, fro example from medical geography and sociology on perspectives of the body in relation to place; emerging analysis of critical perspectives of obesity as an extension of moral values and power; the role of the media in discriminating against fat people etc. Equally, the politics of the global food supply and the impact on public health could be developed further. An interesting tension in public health generally is the issue of power and responsibility between agency (individual) and structure (society); to what extent are consumers really in control of choices around food? Can professionals or consumers really influence food policy or are there greater powers involved? Can consumers influence world trade or distribution? Despite these omissions readers will, I believe, be inspired by this collection of papers to look beyond the basic principles and approaches of public health nutrition.

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