

Current concerns in adolescent nutrition was highlighted in this year's annual conference organised by nutrition scientists.

CLOSE to 400 nutritionists and dietitians from all over the country was in attendance at the just concluded 22nd Scientific Conference of the Nutrition Society of Malaysia (NSM), held in Kuala Lumpur from March 29-30.

For 22 years, this annual scientific meeting has become the biggest nutrition event in the country.

It presents an excellent opportunity for members to interact, to exchange views and experiences.

Humble beginnings

The first of this series of NSM annual scientific conferences was held on March 1, 1986. This was the inaugural scientific conference of the newly registered nutrition society of the country.

Dr Chong Yoon Hin was instrumental in initiating the formation of the Society and the convening of this first conference. It was a small meeting, compared to today's standard. It was, nevertheless, a significant milestone in nutrition science in the country. It was a momentous development in the nutrition scene in Malaysia.

Over the years, the NSM annual conference has grown from strength to strength, in terms of programmes as well as the number of participants. From a half-day conference two decades ago, it is now a full two-day scientific meeting with many more presentations and varied topics.

I do hope that members of the Society will continue to support this annual scientific event and make it an even larger one in years to come. They should regard this as an excellent opportunity to gain new knowledge, share experiences and build a useful network.

The theme of the conference

The theme of this year's NSM scientific conference was: *Current Concerns in Adolescent Nutrition*. Adolescence is the transitional stage of human development where a juvenile matures into an adult. This transition involves biological (i.e. pubertal), social, and psychological changes, though the biological ones are the easiest to measure objectively.

During these changes, adolescents are faced with various challenges, including nutrition-related issues. Tackling the nutrition issues faced by adolescents should be of concern to all nutritionists. The Conference provided the platform to discuss in some detail the main nutritional issues affecting adolescents in the country. Data gathered by local researchers in recent years were reviewed.

The first two symposia were dedicated to the theme of the conference, *Current Concerns in Adolescent Nutrition*. Several issues of concern were highlighted, including food habits and dietary intake, micronutrient deficiencies, bone health, obesity and body image.

All the speakers highlighted the lack of comprehensive data on all these nutritional concerns among adolescents. Dr EG Palaniyappan, Director, Family Health Development Division, Ministry of Health Malaysia, provided a keynote lecture on the theme of the conference. He highlighted various policies and programmes that are in place in the

Experts confer



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Ministry of Health and other government agencies on adolescent health.

Variety of nutrition topics presented

This year's scientific programme was even more compact and interesting compared with that of previous years. Besides the two symposia on adolescent nutrition, there were four other sessions covering a variety of nutrition topics of current interest.

There was a special symposium in which three guest speakers elaborated on *Issues on Fats & Oils in Human Nutrition*. I found this session useful as the speakers covered current concerns and interests of nutritionists. This included a talk on current concerns with trans fatty acids.

Two other invited speakers presented scientific findings in another special symposium on Food Innovations. Scientific evidence was presented on the functional properties of nutrients and other components in foods.

In the nutrition potpourri session, a variety of issues on nutrition and health were presented by members of the Society. The Young Investigator's Symposium, introduced in 2002 to allow final year undergraduate students to present their research findings remains a highlight of the conference. It has been a good training ground for young nutritionists to make an oral presentation.

In addition to the oral presentations, 100 scientific posters were on display throughout the conference. These posters were presented mostly by nutrition undergraduates from local universities. It was evident that most of the students made considerable effort in preparing the posters.

Reflecting on nutrition research

The NSM annual scientific meeting is the main channel for presentation of findings



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ences. The IMR, now more than 105 years old, is the oldest medical and health research institution in the country. I am concerned that we have not been having any original research papers presented in the NSM conference in recent years or published in the *Malaysian Journal of Nutrition*.

I examined the topics that were covered in the presentations, especially the 100 odd posters presented in the conference.

The most number of studies were those on the nutritional status of various community groups. Most of these studies have relied on anthropometric measurements and most of them did not provide biochemical data.

I am concerned that we are not developing the capability to obtain biochemical data adequately.

A good number of studies on dietary intakes or consumption patterns of various population groups were presented in the conference.

These were however mostly cross-sectional studies. There were very few reports of longitudinal studies and also data on effectiveness of community intervention programmes.

Another group of studies with

a large number of abstracts was on analysis of nutrients and other components in food. One area of study that has only a small number of presentations was on clinical nutrition and human intervention trials. I hope that local research institutions would place more emphasis on these studies and build up expertise in this area.

Overall, it was a most fruitful two-day conference. There were many young nutritionists participating in the meetings. I am sure they have benefited from the sessions and their attendance will inspire them to be more active in nutrition work.

As the main person behind the organising of the Conference, I find it most gratifying and rewarding to see the hive of activities, the networking, the discussions that went on, and the eager faces to learn, to seek more information.

■ *NutriScene is a fortnightly column by Dr Tee E Siong, who pens his thoughts as a nutritionist with over 30 years of experience in the research and public health arena. For further information, e-mail starhealth@thestar.com.my.*

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