



Nutri Scene

DR TEE E SIONG
starhealth@thestar.com.my

Nutrition 2009

A round-up of all the significant nutrition events that took place in Malaysia this year.

It has been a busy year for nutrition activities in the country and region. In this instalment of *NutriScene*, I would like to provide a round-up of the main nutrition activities that were carried out through the year.

Nutrition Month Malaysia (NMM) 2009

NMM remains the most important public health nutrition event for the country. This annual nationwide nutrition promotion programme, which started in 2002, aims to promote greater awareness and the practice of healthy eating amongst the community.

For three years, from 2009 till 2011, NMM will adopt the theme *Healthier Children, Healthier Nation*, to focus on promoting good nutrition among children. In the first of this three-year focus, attention was given to pre-school age children.

Four main educational materials were published. *Raising Healthy Eaters* (RHE) and *Easy Nutrition Planner* (ENP) are two booklets targeted at parents, promoting healthy eating amongst their children. The first booklet provides parents with simple basic knowledge about child nutrition; meal planning and shopping; healthy cooking; healthy eating guides, including the child food pyramid; common nutritional problems; and weight monitoring.

The *Easy Nutrition Planner* focuses on providing practical guides and tips on healthy eating, cooking methods, meal planning, shopping, food storage, an FAQ section, and also several recipes. Besides these, a booklet entitled *Creative Recipes with Bread* for children was published.

A DVD that can be used by kindergarten teachers to teach toddlers healthy eating, was also produced. Messages in the DVD are short and tuned to the level of young children. To further make learning these messages fun for the kids, worksheets for colouring and simple quizzes were prepared.

To reach to all in the country, more than a dozen press articles, covering various aspects of child nutrition, were published in major newspapers in the country.

In addition to these educational materials, the main public event was a NMM 2009 Family Carnival in Kuala Lumpur. It was a truly fun and educational event, which included family and child nutrition screening, a toddler talent contest, games, quizzes, and trade exhibition by sponsors of NMM. Additional roadshows were also conducted in Penang and Johor Bahru.

I would like to take this opportunity to urge all parents to make time for your children, now. Seize the moment, and devote yourself to the health of your children today. Find time to ensure that the nutritional needs of your children are met. Healthy eating is not just for Nutrition Month. Healthy eating is for all, at all times. If you missed the educational materials for NMM 2009, visit the Nutrition Society of Malaysia website: www.nutriweb.org.my for more information.

In the meantime, we are working actively to roll out activities for NMM 2010, which shall focus on primary school-age children. Educational materials are at an advanced stage of preparation and public events are being finalised. Do watch out for details in this column and announcements elsewhere!

Scientific meetings

The Annual Scientific Conference of the Nutrition Society of Malaysia has always been the most important nutrition scientific meeting in the country. The 24th annual meeting in this series in March 2009 was again well attended, with a record number of almost 500 participants.

Recognising the importance of promoting healthy eating amongst children, the Nutrition Society of Malaysia (NSM) selected "Healthy children, healthier nation" as the theme of the conference. There were five symposia sessions, with a total of 21 oral



Fun-filled educational activities were the order of the day at the NMM 2009 Family Carnival in Kuala Lumpur held earlier in the year.

presentations, many of which were related to child nutrition.

NSM annual conferences have been organised uninterrupted for 24 years. It provides an excellent opportunity to meet old friends, to network, to exchange views and experience, and to make new friends. NSM needs to continue to play this role. I certainly hope the NSM conference will grow from strength to strength.

Kuala Lumpur hosted an important international nutrition conference in June this year. Organised by the International Life Sciences Institute (ILSI) Southeast Asia Region, and co-organised by the Nutrition Society of Malaysia, the symposium on plant polyphenols provided a forum to deliberate on global scientific developments in the research into biological active ingredients. The two-day symposium highlighted scientific evidence regarding the health-promoting effects of plant polyphenols; their current and potential uses; and consumer aspects and health claims.

Particular attention was given to polyphenols in tea, coffee, nuts and seeds, cocoa and chocolate, soya bean and its related products, fruits, vegetables, and spices.

ILSI SEA Region organised another regional scientific meeting in Kuala Lumpur later in the year, in September. The seminar on dietary fibre provided updates on current understandings in dietary fibre, characteristics, physiological roles and effects on human health. A considerable part of the seminar was devoted to discussions on the regulatory aspects of dietary fibre. These aspects include the legal definition of dietary fibre, labelling of the amounts of dietary fibre, as well as nutrient content claims and nutrient function claims.

Seminar participants also gained insights into international and regional regulations on the definition of dietary fibre and conditions for claims. It also provided a forum for discussion among all stakeholders on these regulatory aspects.

The 19th International Congress of Nutrition (ICN) was held in October in Bangkok. This four-yearly congress, with the main theme, "Nutrition Security for All", was

organised under the auspices of the International Union of Nutritional Sciences (IUNS). It was quite a feat organising an international congress of this scale. I congratulate the organisers, the Nutrition Association of Thailand.

The congress aimed to address nutrition as an integrative science, linking with other disciplines such as biomedical and life sciences, food and agriculture science, and social and behavioral sciences to engage and advance evidence-based policies and programmes within comprehensive food and health delivery systems. You can download many of the presentations on the congress website: http://www.icn2009.com/congress_information_Presentations.html.

Many Malaysian nutritionists and dietitians participated in the ICN 2009, presenting oral presentations and posters and chairing sessions. The Nutrition Society of Malaysia sponsored more than 20 of its members at the ICN. NSM also participated in the general assembly of the Federation of Asian Nutrition Societies (FANS) and that of the IUNS, held in conjunction with the ICN.

I continued to be actively involved in several activities of Codex Alimentarius, the international inter-governmental food standards setting organisation.

The Codex Committee on Nutrition and Foods for Special Dietary Uses (CCNFSDU) recently concluded work on a list of methods for dietary fibre analysis and general principles for establishing nutrient reference values of vitamins and minerals. The committee is proposing new work on general principles for the addition of essential nutrients to foods as well as for the revision of the Codex guidelines on formulated supplementary foods for older infants and young children.

For the Codex Committee on Food Labelling (CCFL), the main items that will continue to be given focus next year include nutrition labelling requirements in relation to the implementation of the global strategy on diet, physical activity and health and labelling of genetically modified foods.

I participated in the 32nd session of the Codex Alimentarius Commission meeting in

Rome held in the middle of this year. During this session, three nutrition related standards were adopted. These were: conditions for nutrient content claim for dietary fibre (and the definition of dietary fibre); nutritional risk analysis principles and guidelines for application to the work of the Committee on Nutrition and Foods for the Special Dietary Uses; and recommendations on the scientific basis of health claims.

A significant milestone in Codex activities for Malaysia was the successfully concluded 21st session of the Codex Committee on Fats and Oils (CCFO) in February this year.

Nutrition policy and programmes

Efforts to review the Malaysian Dietary Guidelines continued through 2008 and 2009 and the revised guidelines are expected to be released early next year. It has been a very detailed, thorough review, revamping the previous guidelines of 1999. All the major food groups are covered in the 14 messages contained in the revised guidelines.

In addition, there is a separate message on physical activity, food safety, and making use of nutrition information.

What is important is to effectively disseminate these messages. I shall certainly help to promote these guidelines, sharing with readers details of these messages in future *NutriScene* write-ups. The Nutrition Society of Malaysia will also be doing its best to ensure that these messages are widely disseminated to the public.

Discussions on drafting the Allied Health Professional Act has been going on for over a decade. The proposed act and regulations cover over 30 allied health professionals, including nutritionists. It is hoped that through these regulations, only appropriately qualified persons can be licensed to practise as a nutritionist and be bound by a code of professional conduct.

In the past year, there has been increased activities to continue perfecting the draft regulations and act. The Nutrition Society of Malaysia has been actively involved in this process, mainly in providing input to appropriate degrees that may be recognised for registration as nutritionist. It is hoped that these drafts can be finalised and gazetted soon. It is important that only qualified nutritionists are allowed to practise nutrition so as not to mislead the consumer.

I participated in a workshop organised by the Ministry of Health Malaysia to identify research priorities in the country for the 10th Malaysia Plan (2010-2015). I understand the report is being finalised. I hope to share with readers the priority areas identified and urge that follow-up activities are carried out to obtain the needed funding.

So, what is my wish for the new year? I wish that all Malaysians will always place good nutrition in the forefront of their daily lives. I would urge readers to continue to place nutrition first when you shop for food, prepare food, and consume meals. Good nutrition must remain an important component of personal and family health care; it is the cornerstone of good health.

■ *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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