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Book Review

Joan Webster-Gandy, Angela Madden and Michelle Holdsworth (editors). *Oxford Handbook of Nutrition and Dietetics*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press 2006. pp. 776. £24.95. ISBN 0 19 856725 1.

This is the most recent in a long line of Oxford handbooks, providing a concise and easily navigable information source that integrates the nutritional sciences, therapeutics and community public health nutrition. Relevant for a wider audience than some of the more clinically focused handbooks, this 'handy' book would be appropriate for doctors, nurses, dietitians, nutritionists and other healthcare professionals (students included).

The book begins with clear contents pages, making it easy to find the relevant section. The first eight of the thirty-five chapters outline fundamental nutrition-related facts and figures: Introduction to nutrition including definitions, components of the diet, food composition tables and digestion mechanisms; food-based dietary guidelines and dietary reference values; current dietary patterns in the UK; Nutrition assessment including individual dietary assessment methods, body composition and anthropometry; Nutrients including detail on macronutrients, vitamins and minerals; Food labelling, functional foods and food supplements; Non-nutrient components of food, for example, alcohol, biologically active dietary constituents and food additives; Drug–nutrient interactions and prescription of nutritional products. Each of these initial chapters provides a solid introduction but also clear and up-to-date factual information.

Chapters 9–12 deal with the life cycle, highlighting key dietary and nutritional considerations at each stage, including recommendations, specific issues and problems, particularly for vulnerable groups. Firstly, details of diet before and during pregnancy are outlined, moving onto the importance of nutrition on growth and development in infants and preschool children, followed by issues for school-aged children and adolescents, culminating with older individuals. Each of these sections includes practical suggestions on how to tackle the many challenges.

Public health nutrition is introduced in chapter 13, which collates information on special population groups and issues of health inequalities. Low income, ethnic minorities, refugees and asylum seekers are mentioned along with policy options for reducing food poverty. This is followed by nutrition interventions with individuals (chapter 14) and populations (chapter 15) covering a vast array of subject matter relevant to public health nutrition: food choice, nutrition education, communication skills and behaviour change; national food and nutrition policy; health improvement. These are very useful reference pages that introduce the basics of some of the real public health nutrition challenges.

Nutrition Support has a large chapter (16) focusing on 'Nutrition in the 'non-healthy state''. This introduces various key elements of how to treat undernutrition, including: screening (malnutrition universal screening tool, MUST); enteral feeding; parenteral nutrition; re-feeding syndrome; critical care – head, burns and spinal cord injuries. Although an ambitious task to cover this sufficiently in one chapter, the main key issues are drawn out in a cohesive manner.

Chapters 17–20 outline the non-communicable diseases (obesity, diabetes, CVD and cancer) encompassing: pathophysiology; classifications and prevalence, contributing causes and clinical consequences; education, dietary goals and treatment and management options. Once more, some very useful and practical material is displayed.

Chapters 21–33 deal with most of the main clinical conditions relating to nutrition and dietetics. These include gastrointestinal, liver, renal, respiratory, mental health, neurological, and metabolic disorders, HIV infection and rheumatology, to name but a few. Each condition is defined along with its pathophysiology and dietary approaches to management and/or treatment. The final two chapters consider hospital catering and popular diets, incorporating some further useful reference material.

The appendices complete the handbook, as they contain valuable information on anthropometry conversions, weights and measures, energy expenditure equations, clinical chemistry reference ranges, dietary reference values, nutritional composition of common foods, useful contacts, socio-economic classifications and bibliography.

This is indeed a comprehensive handbook that contains a wealth of information on a wide range of nutrition-related topics. It is extremely useful to have all of this information in the one place for reference purposes, although limitations to any reference book must be considered. It is assumed that all material is up to date and evidence based by the fact that all of the contributors are eminent and qualified individuals. However, in the climate of evidence-based practice, I found it rather curious that, although there is an extensive bibliography and some very useful websites, the handbook contains no specific references at the end of each chapter. This is perhaps due to lack of space to add all appropriate sources and seems to conform to the style of the Oxford Handbook series. On further investigation, I found this to be a pragmatic decision, as the handbook aims to present information where there is most consensus on a given topic – so that those reading it get the mainstream view on a topic.

This is a competitively priced book that will be of great use to a wide audience. I have found it extremely helpful already as a reference source and teaching aid and have highly recommended it to both students and colleagues.

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