

Editor's note

The last 2009 issue of SAJCN bids farewell to the outgoing year with some interesting and thought provoking concepts outlined in the invited review by Thomas T Samaras. The theme of the review is in line with the known and long debated question “is more better” except the question, which will no doubt will continue to be debated, is “is bigger better” or “does human body size matter”?. The review contains extracts of Samaras’ acclaimed^{1,2} book³ provides new insights on human body size, challenges current recommendations for growth and height, argues on the basis of some credible evidence that “Western diseases, the primary cause of later-life mortality, correlate with changes in nutrition, lifestyle and increasing body size”, and predicts that “promoting widespread increases in height and weight through overnutrition will have a major impact on future health costs that could adversely affect most economies of the world. The ramifications of the prediction are indeed too complex to contemplate in the current intervention practices in nutrition.

Equally interesting is the rejection by the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) of some 350 claims made for food products currently marketed as “good for your health” due to lack of robust evidence for the claims including those for most probiotics. Not unexpectedly, the lay press was quick to glamorize the issue, ““Taking the ‘pro’ out of probiotic: Can a strain of bacteria really improve our immunity? Damning EU research suggests not” claiming the Guardian in the United Kingdom.⁴ Still, on reflection, we may have been insufficiently critical of such claims and too ready to accept the claimed benefits without adequate consideration of the possibility of such products having “no effect” or actually doing harm. The stringent EFSA regulations for such claims are indeed most welcome as they promise to stimulate further research which will afford a better perspective on the use and claimed benefits of such products.

Finally, a verbatim extract⁵ attributed to an article written by Adam Habib⁵ provokes thoughts which promise further developments, hopefully positive ones, in the field of access of scientific information: “Can you imagine an industry in which the workers who laboriously produce the product are paid by the public purse, those that painstakingly review the quality of the product are also paid by the public purse, and then the product is sold by a private company back to public institutions at a huge profit? The company tends to be European or North American, its products are priced in euros or dollars and its publicly-paid workforce comes from across the globe as do its large profits - at the cost of the beleaguered budgets of nation states, especially those of the developing world. The situation reminds one of feudal relations established in the colonies at the height of imperialism. Yet such an industry thrives in the 21st century: this is the world of the international academic journals publication industry.” Another “bubble” that may burst or change shape soon, one wonders?

References

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4. Lawrence F. Taking the ‘pro’ out of probiotic. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/lifeandstyle/2009/oct/06/probiotic-eu-ruling>; accessed 30th November 2009.
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