

Addressing the nutrition extremes

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Food is essential for health and survival of the human body. This is the main concept behind the subject of nutritional science.

Looking back briefly at the history of Nutrition many would agree that one of the major breakthroughs in Nutrition and the use of Nutrition therapy was the first controlled therapeutic trial conducted by James Lind in 1747 to successfully treat scurvy on twelve patients at sea.

By the mid twentieth century, changes in the concept of Nutrition were introduced and the emphasis was placed on the prevention of nutritional deficiency, especially in post war Britain.

As time moved on, there was a gradual shift from rationing to surplus food in developed countries and this leads us to the current emphasis on dietary guidelines and healthy eating.

In recent years the move from having a sufficient to an excess of food supply in developed countries has meant a change in the nutritional status in these populations - a change from under-nutrition to over-nutrition.

However, in situations of morbid obesity, a healthy balanced diet coupled with increased physical activity may not be enough to achieve desired weight loss. Eileen Vella highlights the next step-pharmacological treatment of obesity and indications for use.

Many diet related conditions we are faced with today are linked to obesity. This has led to the need for more precise methods of nutritional assessment to measure the risk of developing obesity

related conditions such as diabetes and heart disease.

Mario Caruana expertly guides us through the changes which have occurred in the nutrition guidelines for diabetes and explains the role of the multidisciplinary team in diabetes management.

However we must not make the mistake of thinking that the days of malnutrition are over. The World Health Organisation has recently stated that half the children's deaths (53%) in developing countries are linked to poor nutrition. It seems then that we are experiencing two extremes of nutrition with related co-morbidity and mortality. It is up to us as healthcare professionals to find the right tools to diagnose and effectively treat these extremes.