It has often been pointed out that there is a near absence of nutrition education during medical school. If this deficiency is corrected during postgraduate medical training, it often owes more to accident than design, or the personal interests of individual physicians. As a result most physicians presently in practice have gaping holes in their knowledge of nutrition [1, 2]. This book is intended to help correct this deficiency.

Many advances took place in our understanding of basic nutrition during the twentieth century. In the first half of the century the focus was largely on vitamins and minerals. Since the 1970s there has been a flood of research studies on the role of diet in such chronic diseases as heart disease and cancer. Today, we have a vastly greater understanding of the role of diet in causing various chronic diseases of lifestyle. This evidence convincingly demonstrates that nutrition serves as an essential weapon for physicians in the battle against disease and for the enhancement of human health. We know, for example, that the risk of developing cancer, heart disease, obesity, and type 2 diabetes is affected by such foods as whole grain cereals, fruits, and vegetables.

We can point to a great many examples of how dietary change can have a profound effect on health, especially for the risk of chronic diseases. Here is one example. Poland went through a severe economic and political crisis during the 1980s and into the 1990s. One of the results of this was a sharp decrease in availability of meat and other foods of animal origin. At the same time there was an increase in consumption of fruits and vegetables and a decrease in smoking. This was followed by a 40% drop in mortality from coronary disease during the period 1990–2002 [3]. Nevertheless, there are still many gaps in our knowledge. For example, we cannot properly explain why taking a vitamin supplement pill seldom delivers any health benefits.

To paraphrase Churchill, advances in the field of nutrition science in recent years represent “not the beginning of the end but, perhaps, the end of the beginning.” In the opinion of the editors we are ready to help physicians move their patients from the hors d’oeuvres to the main course.

Cultural change at a global, national, and regional level means that our nutrition habits and our interpretation of them will change as time marches on. As George Bernard Shaw said…“Everything I eat has been proved by some doctor or other to be a deadly poison, and everything I don’t eat has been proved to be indispensable for life. But I go marching on.” His comments are a reflection of the continued confusion in the public and among health professionals about what to eat and how much to eat. A simple walk through the self-help section of a book store will confirm the existence of many differing opinions of what “preventative nutrition” is all about, some verging on quackery and others built upon solid facts. Physicians and other healthcare professionals need the best possible interpretation of nutrition so that they are empowered to provide accurate advice to their clients.

In the words of Confucius: “The essence of knowledge is that, having acquired it, one must apply it.” But, ironically, despite overwhelming evidence that nutrition has such enormous potential to improve human well-being—at modest cost—there is still a chasm between nutrition knowledge and its full exploitation for human betterment. There is also an important chasm between evaluating the
strength of the supporting science and understanding its true meaning. Once the true meaning of nutritional information is understood, the next hurdle is to bring dietary change to the public and the healthcare professionals who provide healthcare to the public.

As gatekeepers to the nutritional health of their patients, it is important that healthcare professionals have access to up-to-date nutrition resources—such as this handbook—as well as the nutrition expertise of a registered dietitian. *Nutrition Guide for Physicians and Related Healthcare Professionals* endeavors to address the needs of those who would most benefit from up-to-date information on recent advances in the field of nutrition. Accordingly, our book contains chapters by experts in a diverse range of nutritional areas. Our aim is to present a succinct overview of recent thinking and discoveries that have the greatest capacity to aid physicians and other healthcare professionals in improving the nutritional health of their clients.

The opening six chapters (Part 1) address the nutrient requirements and special nutrition-related issues for people across all stages of the lifespan—from pregnancy and infancy through the adolescent years to the older adult years. Chapters 7–19 (Part 2) summarize the role of nutrition in the prevention and management of chronic conditions frequently seen in clinical practice, including obesity, diabetes, coronary heart disease, hypertension, cancer, gastrointestinal disorders, liver and pancreatic disease, chronic kidney disease, osteoporosis, eating disorders, inherited metabolic disorders, and food allergies and intolerances. This is followed by Chaps. 20–27 (Part 3) that look at different aspects of the diet, including vitamins, minerals, and dietary fiber, and recommendations for vegetarian diets, organic food, and alcoholic and nonalcoholic beverages. Chapter 28 (Part 4) then summarizes our current knowledge regarding the relationship between diet and health. That chapter concludes with an overview of various food guides. This theme continues in Chaps. 29–31 (Part 5) that explore diverse sources of information including Dietary Reference Intakes, food labels, and useful approaches for persuading patients to make healthful behavior changes. The final five chapters cover several diverse topics (Part 6). Chapter 32 examines issues related to dietary supplements, especially the problem of dishonest marketing. Chapter 33 then looks at the widespread problem of misleading information in the area of nutrition. Finally, Chaps. 34–36 consider three other topics: drug interactions with foods, methods for assessing nutritional status, and bariatric surgery.

Some readers may disagree with particular opinions presented by the authors, but in nutrition, differences of opinion are often unavoidable because nutrition is an ever-changing science that lives and breathes debate and controversy. Readers are also reminded that nutrition is a fast evolving science. Many ideas regarding nutrition that are widely accepted today may be discredited in coming years. The following three quotes illustrate our changing understanding of what constitutes nutritional and medical wisdom.

Herman Boerhaave (1668–1738) was a great Dutch physician. One story is that he left a book in which he had set out all the secrets of medicine. After he died it was opened and all the pages were blank except one on which was written: “Keep the head cool, the feet warm and the bowels open.”

It was not so long ago that vegetarians were seen as cranks. Here is what George Orwell had to say in *The Road to Wigan Pier,* written in 1936:

I have here a prospectus [from a socialist summer school] which... asks me to say 'whether my diet is ordinary or vegetarian'. They take it for granted, you see, that it is necessary to ask this question. This kind of thing is by itself sufficient to alienate plenty of decent people. And their instinct is perfectly sound, for the food-crank is by definition a person willing to cut himself off from human society in hopes of adding five years on to the life of his carcase; this is, a person out of touch with the common humanity.

Drummond and Wilbraham published a seminal book entitled *The Englishman’s Food* in 1939. Jack Drummond was a major nutrition authority in the 1920s and 1930s. It would be foolhardy to believe that we can be any more accurate today in our predictions than they were over 70 years ago.
So much precise research has been done in the laboratory and so many precise surveys have been made that we know all we need to know about the food requirements of the people….The position is perfectly clear-cut [with respect to Britain].

Athabasca, AB, Canada
Winona, MN, USA
Baton Rouge, LA, USA

References

Nutrition Guide for Physicians and Related Healthcare Professionals
Temple, N.J.; Wilson, T.; Bray, G.A. (Eds.)
2017, XXXII, 392 p. 20 illus., 14 illus. in color., Softcover
ISBN: 978-3-319-49928-4
A product of Humana Press