Nutrition and Growth

Editors

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Preface

The objective of the workshop was to summarize major developments in the last decade in our understanding of the relationship between nutrition and child growth, with emphasis on developing countries. The Subcommittee on Nutrition (ACC/SCN) of the United Nations estimates that 47% of children less than 5 years old in developing countries were stunted in 1980 and that this figure declined to 33% by 2000. In absolute numbers, this represents 221 million stunted children in 1980 and 182 million today. The magnitude of the problem remains large, and without significant advances in prevention, it will take much of the 21st century to eliminate the problem of undernutrition and growth failure, particularly in the Indian subcontinent and sub-Saharan Africa. At the same time, many are concerned that the profound changes taking place in developing countries, associated with globalization, economic transformation, and urbanization, are altering patterns of eating and physical activity and ushering in an epidemic of chronic diseases of dietary origin, including obesity. These changes have been referred to as the “nutrition transition.” We have before us, therefore, yesterday’s agenda about undernutrition substantially uncompleted, as well as an emerging agenda of overnutrition and chronic diseases. A major challenge ahead is to implement policies and programs that eliminate stunting but prevent obesity. Both old and emerging agendas were covered in the 47th Nestlé Workshop, held in Santiago de Chile.

Among the topics covered were reviews of several efforts underway worldwide to generate new reference data for the assessment of growth, advances in knowledge about the causes of growth failure, updates on the consequences of poor growth for individuals and societies across a range of functional indicators, review of public health approaches to prevent growth failure, and discussions of the nutrition transition and the possible link between growth retardation in early life and risk of chronic disease in adulthood. One of us (R.M.) had the pleasure of attending the 14th workshop, held in 1986 and ably chaired by professor John Waterlow, that was titled “Linear growth retardation in less developed countries.” Reflecting on this experience, two seemingly contradictory observations come to mind. The first is that we have learned so much about the subject of nutrition and growth in the last 15 years; it was precisely the review of these advances that guided the selection of topics and speakers. The second observation is that despite progress, we have so much more to learn and apply for the benefit of children. We hope that the Workshop contributed to identifying priorities for future work, although this was not an explicit goal.

We thank the personnel of Nestlé Chile for their able assistance and hospitality.

Professor Reynaldo Martorell, USA
Professor Ferdinand Haschke, Austria
Foreword

Despite considerable efforts over the past decades, undernutrition and growth failure remain a major problem in most developing countries. In addition, the nutrition transition occurring in these countries leads to new nutritional influences that also affect child growth. The objective of this 47th Nestlé Nutrition Workshop was to present new reference data for the assessment of infant and child growth, to review major causes and consequences of inadequate growth, and to evaluate the effectiveness of nutrition intervention programs.

We thank Professor Martorell and Professor Haschke for preparing the program of this workshop and for inviting speakers who shared their expertise and opinions in the field of nutrition and growth. Invited physicians and scientists from 34 countries substantially contributed to the discussions with their own observations and experiences.

We also thank Nestlé Chile for their excellent organization and warm hospitality which greatly contributed to the success of the event.

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