



## THE HEALTHY ROLE OF COMMUNITY NUTRITION

*Although community nutrition arguably began in 1894 at The World's Fair held in Chicago or about the same time nutrition first became recognized as a discipline, there are still many who are confused by it. What is community nutrition and what is its role?*

Community nutrition encompasses a broad set of activities designed to provide access to a safe, adequate, healthful diet to a population living in a particular geographic area. These activities include nutrition education, nutrition or health promotion, food programs, supplementation programs (e.g., fluoride), preventive programs, local policy analysis and development, and the organizational infrastructure that supports it. "Ideally, community nutrition involves four interrelated steps to deliver services: assessment to identify the problem(s), planning to meet the community nutrition needs, implementation to develop systems to reduce the problem and evaluation to see if the problem has been ameliorated or solved,"<sup>1</sup> says Anita Owen, M.A., R.D., co-author of *Nutrition in the Community*.

Community nutritionists are the folks in the trenches who translate general recommendations into action. They are bound together across geographic or common interest boundaries by a shared set of values, field strategies and educational experiences. Community nutritionists also have an understanding of and appreciation for dietetic and clinical practices, which address nutrition problems from an individual level. Community nutritionists engage the public in their public programming. They also work closely with educational institutions as well as government, commercial and not-for-profit organizations in any given community. The community nutritionist's target groups within a community may be bound together by common interest, risk or other characteristics—for example—pregnant and lactating women or the urban elderly and homeless. Regardless of the particular focus, a community nutritionist should ultimately consider all policy and programming in terms of the health of the overall community.

Some years ago, Jean Mayer noted that nutrition is an agenda, a set of scientific disciplines whose end is action: "Nutritionists, unlike biochemists and physiologists, but like cardiologists and pediatricians, have to see their science as one whose goal is to benefit mankind."<sup>2</sup> Community nutrition is, therefore, integral to nutrition as a discipline because it is where the nutrition professional works to ensure that nutrition is, in fact, true to an agenda and serving the people it purports to. Or, to put it another way, Gandhi said, "You must be the change you wish to see in the world." Community nutritionists simply enact the changes that nutritionists want to see in the world.

The Community Nutritionary publication and the Dannon Institute Awards for Excellence in Community Nutrition celebrate these professionals, for we owe all community nutritionists our thanks. They make the abstract ideas spun out from our research laboratories and policy-making chambers concrete, real and meaningful to actual people. They move theory into action and research into practice.

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#### REFERENCES:

- <sup>1</sup> Owen, A., *Nutrition in the Community*, 1998.
- <sup>2</sup> Mayer, J., Social responsibilities of nutritionists, *Journal of Nutrition* 116:714-717, 1986.