Introductory Remarks and Policy Recommendations

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At its core, Nutrition Research and the Elderly II: The Role of Nutrition in Long Term Care was a conference dedicated to two themes: building linkages between nutrition research and nutrition practice professionals and developing national nutrition policy based on scientific findings and proven best practices.

The National Eldercare Institute on Nutrition was the proud sponsor of this event, the second of its nature, in collaboration with Nestlé R&D, Clintec Nutrition Company, and Nestlé USA. The joining of these public and private organizations to ensure a noteworthy event deserves mention. The dedication of the representatives from each group who served on our planning committee was apparent throughout the process. An introduction to the proceedings from the conference would be lacking without the acknowledgment of this hardworking group: Alison Kretser, Nestle R&D; Hugh Tucker, Clintec Nutrition Company; Thad Jackson, Nestle USA; Louise Hilson, Nestle USA; and James S. Whaley, National Association of State Units on Aging. Without a doubt, I consider collaborating with these individuals to be one of my most rewarding professional experiences, and I believe that the participants at the conference will concur that all of the planning efforts were worthwhile.

There was a sense of “momentousness” surrounding this event. Not only had many leading researchers in this field gathered to share their latest findings, but this was a unique opportunity to directly influence future policy related to nutrition services for older Americans. As the only national “preconference” to the White House Conference on Aging devoted solely to nutrition issues, additional dimension and responsibility were pervasive throughout the 2 days.

Recommendations made in a special closing session of the meeting were made part of the permanent record of the 1995 White House Conference on Aging. To be able to create recommendations with the participation of the best and brightest of America’s nutrition researchers and practice leaders was energizing and led to the three Issue Statements and Policy Recommendations below:

Issue Statement I

Ensuring adequate nutrition for America’s older citizens has been proven to reduce health care costs and enhance quality of life. No other health or social service mix can make up for the lack of proper nourishment. In-home and community-based nutrition service, as a basic component of a comprehensive care plan, can aid in the prevention of more costly institutional care.

Recommendation I

That reimbursement be provided for the provision of an array of nutrition services to include, but not be limited to, nutrition assessment and counseling, a full complement of daily meals, and, as medically warranted, therapeutic meals and nutritional supplements. These should be expanded through established legislation such as the Older Americans’ Act, Medicare, and Medicaid.

Issue Statement II

An emphasis needs to be placed on identifying older individuals at risk of malnutrition before disease finds them. This is evident in the “failure to thrive” syndrome and others like it. These syndromes are not normal aging. They are rooted in poor nutrition and a lack of physical activity and need to be addressed before other, more costly, methods of intervention are required.

Recommendation II

That the US Department of Health and Human Service encourage health and social service professionals serving older persons and their caregivers to
routinely evaluate the nutrition status of elderly persons as part of their regular assessment procedures. That renewed emphasis be given to preventive approaches that use nutrition services to maintain the health and independence of older persons.

**Issue Statement III**

Emerging nutrition research has resulted in a growing base of scientific knowledge specific to older individuals. This new information provides a basis for policy and standards related to senior nutrition programs that would, if applied, maximize the impact of nutritional services for at-risk elders.

**Recommendation III**

That the National Institutes of Health establish as a priority the development of Recommended Dietary Allowances (RDAs) for the elderly that take into consideration not only chronological age but also physiologic age and chronic disease status and that these specific, elder-based guidelines become the policy basis for nutrition services for the elderly.

As we left this second Nutrition Research and the Elderly conference, we were reminded of the importance of finding regular opportunities and avenues to share information. Research alone is not the answer; there must be implementation of knowledge for it to have its intended impact. The best nutrition service programs in the country cannot afford to operate without an ear to the new findings that science is regularly bringing. National policy must reflect current understanding of an issue and be used to take established government funding services constantly toward new standards of excellence. And, as both of our Nutrition Research and the Elderly conferences have displayed, there is much to be gained by seeking out our professional counterparts in other countries who are gathering critical data. Together it is possible to extend the impact of this gathering toward the betterment of health for older citizens throughout the world.

This issue of *Nutrition Reviews* offers us another avenue to share knowledge. These proceedings are rich with new information and data. We are confident that this special edition will be a valuable resource, and we are pleased to be able to make it available to you.