

Case Study: Centre for Evidence-Based Nutrition, South Africa

'Killer' fact

Policies promoted to assure food security are not well embedded in reliable evidence, are often expensive, and can do harm. This initiative will help in introducing rigorous methods to assess and use reliable research information in policy.

Summary

This project is currently being set up. See below for project vision.

The establishment of a unique Centre for Evidence-based Nutrition in Africa based in the Division of Human Nutrition, at Stellenbosch University and Tygerberg Academic Hospital that can help identify priorities for primary and secondary research, facilitate discussion and collaboration between researchers across various fields and promote the production of systematic reviews of relevant evidence to inform practice and policy.

The Centre can also contribute to the achievement of key MDGs through systematic assembly of the available evidence to enable the implementation of effective nutrition interventions. Making well-informed decisions about how best to achieve the MDGs depends on public policy makers' accessing the best available evidence about what is known to work and what could be potentially useful, and finding ways to integrate these solutions into complex and often under-resourced health systems. Expertise in the successful execution of systematic reviews already exists in the Division of Human Nutrition, with systematic reviews being undertaken by postgraduate students and staff under the guidance of the South African Cochrane Centre.

Other research focus areas of the Division, ie food security and infectious diseases will also be addressed through this proposed Centre. Furthermore it is envisioned that the Nutrition Information Centre of the University of Stellenbosch (NICUS) undertake the 'translating' of research outcomes and evidence to the public, the media, health professionals and policy makers to provide up-to-date, authoritative information on nutrition in order to create a scientifically sound nutrition culture.

The current food crisis, widespread hunger and malnutrition have highlighted the need worldwide, and especially in Africa and other developing regions to make sense of the available evidence, in order to develop clear guidelines on appropriate nutrition and related interventions.

The efficacy and safety of nutrition interventions need to be systematically reviewed and consultations convened on controversial issues to enable stakeholders to make informed and evidence-based food and nutrition policy for effective and sustainable interventions. Furthermore, the vast amount of available nutritional supplements and alternative diet therapies (often accompanied by unsubstantiated claims), complicate decision-making on the part of health care professionals. The evidence, or lack thereof, supporting these supplements and diet therapies, needs to be investigated and appropriately aggregated, if possible, to inform evidence-based practice.

Impact

There will be impact in the contribution to the achievement of key MDGs through systematic assembly of the available evidence to enable the implementation of effective nutrition

interventions. There will also be impact in the areas of food security and infectious disease. The emphasis on the 'translation' of research outcomes and evidence to ensure that different audiences (the public, the media, health professionals and policy makers) have the best possible access to the information will also ensure that maximum impact will be gained from the outcomes.



Proposed components of the Centre for Evidence Based Nutrition, Division of Human Nutrition, Stellenbosch University

Partners

Effective Health Care Research Consortium

South African Cochrane Centre

Division of Human Nutrition (Stellenbosch University and Tygerberg Academic Hospital)

Nutrition Information Centre of the University of Stellenbosch

African Micronutrient Research Group

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