**Book Reviews**


This book is a documentation of the development of transdisciplinary workers in an Indian non-governmental organization (NGO), the Chennai-based Vidya Sagar (formerly the Spastics Society of India). It states clearly that it is 'not a documentation of a research paper' and 'aims to encourage further discussion around the need for developing transdisciplinary workers and the need to train more of these individuals'.

A partnership between Skillshare International and Vidya Sagar, the training of transdisciplinary workers in Chennai arose out of a mother's (Poonam Natarajan) conviction that one individual trained in all relevant aspects of disability such as special education, and physical, occupational and speech therapy would look at the child more holistically and be able to provide more relevant integrated care. This training could also empower parents to become transdisciplinary workers themselves.

A transdisciplinary approach is explained as requiring team members to 'share roles and systematically cross discipline boundaries'. Parents have reported that coping with large numbers of professionals is often emotionally draining. With this approach there would be one key worker to address all their queries. Disabled children too would have to relate to only one professional on a regular basis.

In the present scenario, when inclusive education is gaining ground as the most accepted form of education, the transdisciplinary worker can be the one-stop window for addressing all needs and can devise a more integrated programme that allows the child to fit more naturally into the classroom without the need to be pulled out for various therapy and education programmes. The concept of a transdisciplinary worker is ideal for our socioeconomic conditions. This same concept also emerged during the Spastics Society of India/Unicef research project, 'Inclusive education practice in early childhood in Mumbai, India'.

There are a number of models for the development of multipurpose workers in the field of disability and inclusion in India. This book documents one model and is based on a 3-year training course during which a team of 6 professionals from Vidya Sagar were trained in physical, speech and occupational therapy of disabled children. The book performs an important function through this sharing of experiences of NGO growth. It takes pains to explain the concept as well as to allay any fears that paraprofessionals may have about transdisciplinary training encroaching upon their areas of expertise. However, it is repetitive in its advocacy of the need for transdisciplinary workers.

An interesting fact brought out is that the transdisciplinary worker could be anyone—the class teacher, parent; in fact, any person in the field who has undergone training.

Divided into sections, the book uses figures, diagrams and cartoons effectively, serving to turn a potentially dry case report into a dynamic representation of the personnel involved, processes followed and results obtained. However, one wishes that the cartoons and diagrams had continued through the narrative. It would have made reading more enjoyable. Interspersing parental views at relevant portions in the book rather than clubbing them in one chapter would have made for more interesting reading.

Though the case studies of children have also been dealt with in a similar manner, the inclusion of the programme followed for each child and the progress made as a result as well as the future plan relieves the monotony. Details of activities that have been used will be helpful to parents and professionals alike. Interspersing case studies and 'voices' of the various stakeholders will help parents understand the approach.

Simple, easy-to-understand language has been used to tell a story. The book's appeal will, however, be limited to professionals, NGOs and parents. What I enjoyed as a non-medical person was the fact that movement needs were not given paramount importance in transdisciplinary training. As teachers we are often faced with the prioritization of movement and physiotherapy needs by parents. The documentation of the children's realization that mobility is not the only parameter to be used is important and needs to be shared with parents and professionals. Including the views of medical doctors is a wise move, given our conditioning of accepting their views as the gospel truth.

On the critical side, one does have complaints about the format followed. It varies through the book and in some cases within the same section such as in the children's case studies. Different formats have also been followed in the section on the proposed curriculum. Some courses have listed aims, others do not.

More attention should have been paid to the printing—crooked margins and unattractive fonts take away from the pleasure of reading. The reasonable price is an attraction; however, the cover could have been better designed.

The book focuses mainly on the positive; it has a 'feel good' factor. Though a few areas that still need to be worked on are also mentioned, the mistakes that may have been made, the difficulties faced along the way are not included. Listing the pitfalls would have been beneficial for the readers who are, due to the nature of the book, necessarily stakeholders interested in the concept. However, criticisms of the concept have been voiced and dealt with. Perhaps a note of caution needs to be inserted that the transdisciplinary worker is not trained to address all conditions but only those of disabled children. They are not a replacement for medical professionals but a support.

The book succeeds in introducing the concept of transdisciplinary training, provides exhaustive knowledge about the training, and accurately represents the views of parents, and medical and paramedical professionals. It is a mix of facts and emotions, processes and results. It will help prevent reinvention of the wheel as well as help others to learn and benefit from the process.

VARSHA HOOJA
National Inclusion Centre
The Spastics Society of India
K.C. Marg, Bandra Reclamation
Bandra (West), Mumbai, Maharashtra
varshahooja@hotmail.com
The published proceedings of the Nestle Nutrition Workshop Series, a food industry-sponsored venture, have carved out a niche for themselves in the scientific literature. The success of this series is evident from the fact that this is the 57th volume since its initiation. Usually, the subjects of these workshops relate to the frontier areas of maternal, neonatal and paediatric nutrition, and not surprisingly many of them have implications for product development. Occasionally, opinions have been expressed regarding the potential conflict of interest of the chosen editors, authors and participants.

The topic of the current workshop is well chosen and timely, as considerable evidence has now linked adult diseases to foetal, infant and childhood nutrition. It is therefore apt to evaluate the evidence in an unbiased manner to initiate appropriate preventive efforts. The direct impact of nutrition on health could be short term, long term programming or throughout childhood. Nutrition is also a vehicle for factors that influence health such as pathogens and toxins. In this context, the workshop used a modified definition of primary prevention, namely, to reduce the risk of or prevent disease, and prevent impairment of cognitive potential.

The various chapters have been grouped into different sections including cardiovascular diseases, obesity, the metabolic syndrome and diabetes mellitus; atopy, allergy and infectious diseases; osteoporosis and cancer; influence of long chain polyunsaturated fatty acids on multiple health outcomes; and impact of nutrition on health. Most of the authors have ongoing projects or published work of repute in their respective fields. In most of the chapters, important emerging evidence, usually related to observational trials, has been reviewed and well encapsulated.

Compelling data are presented leaving little doubt that atherosclerosis and possibly the metabolic syndrome begin in childhood, and that the risk factors are identifiable early in life. There is a wealth of observational data showing that breastfeeding is associated with reduction of key components of the metabolic syndrome, high blood pressure, raised low density lipoprotein, obesity and insulin resistance. In preterm infants causation can be confirmed by randomized trials. The role of breastfeeding in preventing atopy and asthma is highlighted, and evidence presented to suggest that allergen-avoidance diets during pregnancy and lactation should remain investigational only. It is heartening to note that despite potential conflict of interest, the importance of breastfeeding for infant health, and for preventing allergic disorders and adult diseases has not been masked or diluted.

Exciting animal and human data have been presented, which suggest the possibility of a relationship between prenatal, perinatal and postnatal factors and the development of adult diseases such as obesity, diabetes, osteoporosis and cancer. The huge information gap has been highlighted, and issues requiring further research identified. It has been suggested that multilevel mechanistic research may provide the best underpinning for preventive strategies, and that mechanistic research should not be just thought of at the genetic or molecular cell biological level but also at the physiological level. For example, mechanisms at the structural, behavioural and social levels represent exciting possibilities; the latter being important in the area of obesity.

It is amply clear that perinatal and infant nutritional interventions may have effects that do not emerge until much later in life, and that these may be the opposite of what was expected, raising a safety concern. Thus, long term issues need to be addressed in future studies on this subject. In terms of the quality of evidence, whenever they are possible, experimental studies are a sounder basis for practice than observational ones; however, it may not always be feasible or ethical to conduct long term randomized trials. An important practical message emerging from this monograph is that it may not always be safe to devise primary intervention policies based on the outcome of interest of the investigator. The same intervention can have beneficial effects on one system, such as cardiovascular health and detrimental effects on another, such as the brain, so that striking a balance between the benefits and risks is a critical exercise in actually producing the best outcome for infants and children.

An innovative and useful aspect of the book is the recording of the participants’ discussion after the main text of the individual presentations. The discussion section often articulates the specific doubts that an informed reader may also encounter, enunciates alternative interpretations and views, and highlights important caveats and researchable issues.

The quality of production of the book is high. Printer’s devils are few and the clarity of the illustrations is commendable. Researchers and academicians in the field of infant nutrition, food industry scientists, and public health specialists would find it useful. However, while evaluating the evidence from the contents, the reader would need to be alert to the possibility of product-oriented conflict of interest.

H. P. S. SACHDEV
Department of Paediatrics and Clinical Epidemiology
Sitaram Bhartia Institute of Science and Research
B-16, Qutub Institutional Area, New Delhi
hpssachdev@gmail.com

The rise of evidence-based medicine has dragged medical research from being an obscure subject to a vital part of the curriculum for postgraduate as well as doctoral students. Medical research requires chaperoning and grooming in the initial years. Planning and executing any study requires an understanding of the basic concepts of research methodology as well as biostatistics, and there is a paucity of books that

fulfil this objective. Often the student has to go through separate books on each of these subjects and then make an attempt to marry the concepts.

This monograph attempts the ambitious task of amalgamating research methodology with basic biostatistics in a concise form. The author has done a wonderful service by providing comprehensive information as a ready reckoner.

This innovative and relevant book is divided into 11 chapters, with well illustrated examples and a glossary at the end. Important facts are highlighted in boxes for easy understanding. The book follows a logical course whereby the reader is taken through the steps required for building and executing a research proposal. It provides a guided framework for students who are apprehensive when initiated into research projects. It is easy to read and informative. The strength of the book is that it provides a foundation for a foray into responsible medical research for doctoral and postgraduate students. The book is also reasonably priced keeping in mind the resource-strapped student it is aimed at. Hence, it is justifiable if the print quality is not of international standards.

The author’s clarity and hold over the topics is evident but the transmission of this information to the reader leaves a little to be desired. There is an attempt to fit in much information in a limited space and in the process the text loses clarity. The monograph endeavours to provide a compact, simplistic picture and aspires to be all-encompassing in the same go. The reader is enveloped with concepts, definitions and statistical formulae. The resultant vector is that it ends up providing a wealth of information but in a cramped space that limits effortless reading. In the preface the mandate of the book is clearly stated ‘it is for those who are initiating themselves into medical research such as postgraduate and doctoral students’. However, the author’s knowledge and hold over the subject is so vast that the provided information ends up veering in too many directions, which becomes a handicap. An example of this is the statistical formulae given as an annex to Chapter 5 (Draw an adequate sample size). The array of formulae for calculating sample size without any adequate explanation would bewilder the student. It may help as an encyclopaedia does by providing all possible inputs but fails to justify the mandate of this book, which is to provide a basic understanding. At the same time, a glaring omission is the absence of any chapter on the computer software packages dealing with statistical analysis. If the book promises to be a comprehensive review on the practical steps of research methodology then the uninitiated student of medical research should be provided with basic information on software programs to be used for data entry and subsequent analysis. This is an essential omission, as is the lack of any introductory information about the author. Dr Abhaya Indrayan is an acknowledged doyen among Indian epidemiologists and biostatisticians but I am sure that the uninitiated student would like to know something about the author. Even the inside cover page does not have the affiliations/degrees of the author.

Consolidating the lattice of biostatistics within the framework of medical research is a juggler’s trick. The author has made a handsome attempt at this and although the book does not come out as a classic text yet Basic methods in medical research is a much welcome volume for postgraduate and doctoral students and can be recommended as a resource.

VINEET AHUJA
Department of Gastroenterology
All India Institute of Medical Sciences
New Delhi


This book does not have a preface so it was difficult to tell if the aims of the editors had been achieved. The blurb states that the book is based on the Eighth International Symposium on Special Aspects of Radiotherapy. I assume that selected papers presented at the conference have been collected in this volume. There are descriptions of the radiotherapy of cutaneous lymphomas, basal cell and squamous cell carcinoma, Kaposi sarcoma, Merkel cell carcinoma and malignant melanoma. In addition, there are a few papers on the classification, clinical features and staging of some of these neoplasias.

The book is likely to appeal to persons with an interest in the radiotherapy of the conditions described. By its nature, a volume of this kind cannot be comprehensive and readers may find that a textbook on the subject serves their needs better.

M. RAMAM
Department of Dermatology and Venereology
All India Institute of Medical Sciences
New Delhi
mramam@hotmail.com