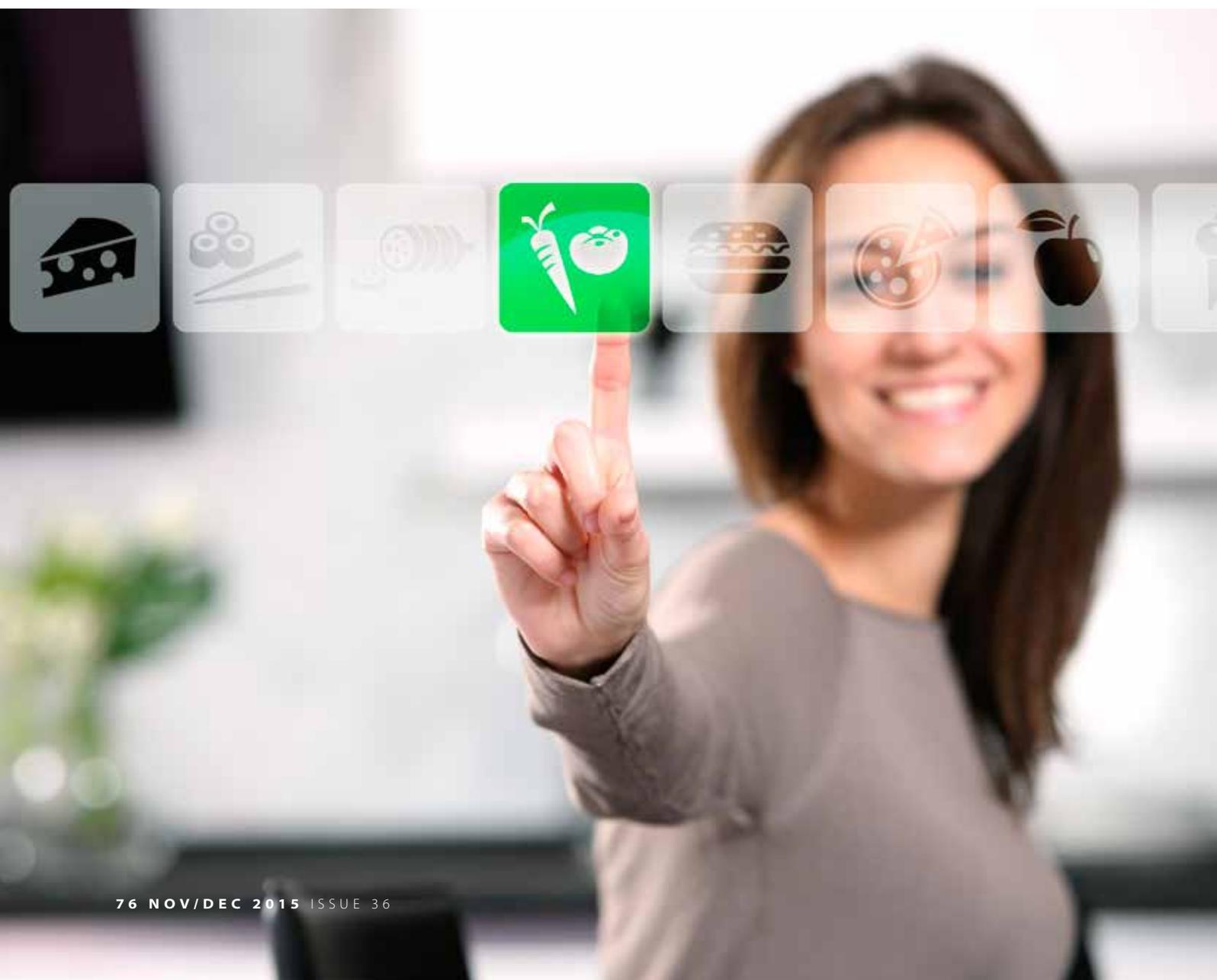


NUTRITION

THE DIET OF THE *FUTURE*



After 25 years in dietetics, advisory board member **Dr Yael Joffe** reflects on some of her own findings and shares new global thinking

I have waited 25 years to write this article. Despite a few attempts at alternative careers I have returned time and time again to work as a dietician. With great fortune, 15 years ago I fell into the field of nutrigenomics (nutrition and genetics) and I have remained there ever since.

I have always felt a level of discomfort with my chosen profession, never feeling entirely proud to define myself as a dietician. It's only in the last few years that I have understood what that may be about. Ignited by the writings of Michael Pollen, Marion Nestle and Raj Patel, I have come to understand that there is something wrong in the way we are researching, advocating and practising nutrition.

What is nutrition?

Gyorgy Scrinis defines the ideology of “nutritionism” as a nutritionally reductive approach whereby nutrition is understood only as nutrients (macro, micro and phyto) rather than as food. Nutritionism has become the ruling ideology of dietetics. It is the ideology of our university education, the food industry, regulatory bodies and health institutions. There is a great need for a new nutrition ideology, a new

way of seeing and knowing about food, nutrition, health and conditions such as obesity. I believe that studying the interactions between food, nature and society will provide a new way of seeing and knowing food and health.

Food as medicine

Nutrition and dietetic professionals throughout the world have been trained in the current ideology of nutritionism. Food is taught, discussed and practised in a biomedical model, with little consideration of the social, environmental, political and economical relations that govern how food is produced and how it is consumed. Dietetic associations around the world (and many dieticians) have unashamedly collaborated with the food industry for sponsorship, research funding and income, although this is changing.

A new scientific approach

I have been a part of nutritionism, working with gene-diet interactions and biochemical pathways. I feel like Mr Incredible's wife in *The Incredibles* movie, Elastigirl, with one of my elastic arms stretched out to encompass the very

“Nutrition science has made giant strides in the last century. But the human population continues to increase, and the global climate is changing, with vast implications. Our science has been good in specific ways, but has ignored and overlooked planetary welfare and thus the basic determinants of human health and well-being. We must now ensure that the practice of our science supports sustainable ecosystems and healthy environments”

– Prof Mark L Wahlqvist

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important nutritional biochemistry (the chemistry within the body that makes it work) and nutrigenomics, and the other arm reaching out to the social and environmental interaction with food.

Recently, I came across The Giessen Declaration and The New Nutrition Science project. The Giessen Declaration was established from a meeting held in 2005 under the auspices of the President of the University of Giessen, the President of the International Union of Nutritional Sciences and the President of the World Health Policy Forum. Some of the best nutrition scientists in the world attended.

This declaration led to the establishment of The New Nutrition Science project. These nutrition scientists proposed that nutrition science retain its current “classical” identity as a biological science but that it should exist within a broader and integrated framework, including as a social and environmental science. In this way it will be concerned with personal, population and planetary health.

A summary

The New Nutrition Science project suggests the idea of “wholesome nutrition” as the most suitable way to eat and drink, with about half of the amount of food eaten consisting of fresh raw foods (fruit, nuts and salads). This entails:

- Eating mostly foods of plant origin that have been processed as little as possible but as much as necessary.
- Fresh foods beneficial to health being prepared as tasty meals.
- Eating mainly fruits, vegetables, wholegrain products, legumes and nuts, as well as milk and dairy products.
- Including small amounts of meat, fish and eggs, if desired.

In addition to considering health, interactions of food with social, ecological and economical aspects are taken into account to achieve sustainability. This means, among other things, buying only eco-friendly food packaging and giving preference to organic and seasonal food produced locally (all food from abroad should originate from fair trading).

There is no doubt in my mind that the principles of The New Nutrition Science project are what are missing from the way we are taught and practise nutrition. But there are many questions that arise for me. Why were no dieticians included in the Giessen meeting? Why did they not have a voice? What has happened to the work that was laid out in 2005? Why did it take me 10 years to find it? Why was it not embraced by the dietetic profession as the way to move forward?

Despite my general disappointment with the way dietetics has been managed in the past, there are many signs that things are changing, and many health practitioners have embraced a more functional and integrative medical paradigm to work within. It has proven to be a more effective approach and I very much look forward to another 25 years as our profession unfolds. **HI**

