Malnutrition: Needs refinement for healthy communities in developing nations

Malnutrition results from eating a diet in which nutrients are either not enough or in excess leading to various health problems. Under-nutrition leads to marasmus, kwashiorkor, vitamin and mineral deficiencies; over-nutrition leads to overweight and obesity and other diseases.

However, the term malnutrition is interchangeable and usually referred to under-nutrition only. Various reports and documents prepared by WHO, UNICEF, UNDP and other organisations equate it with undernutrition which has been primarily the public health problem of have-nots and developing countries and over nutrition being of developed nutrition. India is an emerging economy with 1.2 billion populations where undernutrition has declined from 26% (1991) to 15% in 2014. Five anthropometry reports from UNICEF/WHO/World Bank reveal that prevalence of wasting is 20% and severe wasting is 7%. WHO has also reported presence of overweight (BMI≥25) as 11% and obesity (BMI≥30) as 2% (combined 13%) among adults. Adding 13% of over nutrition to 15% malnutrition in 2014, exceeds 26% of undernutrition existing 25 years back. Thus, gains achieved are neutralised with overall prevalence of malnutrition remaining same. Now, 34%, 11% and 30% of population in India are affected by high blood pressure, blood sugar level and blood cholesterol levels, respectively. Thus, there is a need to understand the health challenges posed by both under and over nutrition and the meaning of “Malnutrition” must be refined; nutrition related programmes and policies of the government must be developed to meet the challenge of malnutrition.

Biography

Vikas Bhatia, MD is currently the Dean of India’s primer institute, Professor and Head of Dept. of Community and Family Medicine at All India Institute of Medical Sciences, Bhubaneswar, India and Editor-in-Chief for Indian Journal of Community and Family Medicine (under aegis of MOHFW, GOI). He is a Public Health Specialist with experience of 29 years in government institutions and UNICEF and has published 75 articles in national and international journals, 35 research and project reports, authored 2 books, and 2 chapters. He has been awarded/honoured by UNICEF, MoH & FW and GOI with Best Scientific Paper Award at National Conference of IAPSM and WONCA World Conference of Rural Health, Melbourne. He is a member and chairperson of various committees, national and international professional bodies.

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