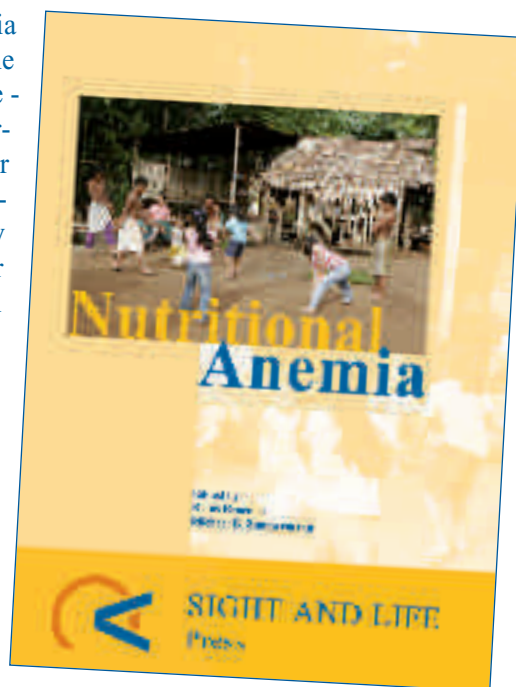


News

JAMA Review of SIGHT AND LIFE's Nutritional Anemia Book and Guidebook

In its June 2008 volume (Vol 299, No. 22), the highly respected Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA) published a favorable review of SIGHT AND LIFE's flagship publications, Nutritional Anemia and the accompanying The Guidebook: Nutritional Anemia, suggesting their appropriateness as a textbook or required reading for graduate-level courses in (especially international) nutrition or health. The reviewer, from the Nutrition and Health Sciences department of the University of Nebraska, further highly recommended both books to health professionals in general, particularly clinicians working with patients suffering from (particularly nutritional) anemia.



Globally, anemia affects over two billion people, including over 800 million women and children under five, mostly in the developing world, of whom approximately a million die each year. Nutritional anemia is mainly caused by a lack of iron, folic acid, vitamin B₁₂ and vitamin A as well as infectious diseases. Despite the magnitude of this problem, little has been documented on the progress in addressing it.

SIGHT AND LIFE organized a workshop on nutritional anemia in September 2006, bringing together leading experts from academia and international organizations. This resulted in the publication in 2007 of Nutritional Anemia, which condenses the information from the workshop and – for the first time

in a single volume – describes the leading research on this subject and provides a road map in the global fight against nutritional anemia, hunger and malnutrition. With the aim of widely diffusing this knowledge to help eradicate this public health burden, SIGHT AND LIFE followed up this publication with The Guidebook: Nutritional Anemia, which provides brief summaries of all the chapters of the main volume for busy decision makers. Both publications are available for download at <http://www.sight-andlife.org>, or can be obtained from SIGHT AND LIFE as a hardcopy.

Copenhagen Consensus 2008: Vitamins for Under-nourished Children are World's best Investments

In May, eight of the world's leading economists, including five Nobel Laureates, assessed two years' work by over 50 economists to prioritize solutions to ten of the world's biggest challenges. Apply -

ing cost-benefit analysis, they identified 30 specific solutions as the best investments to achieve the greatest impact.

The effort, dubbed the Copenhagen Consensus, ranked the provision of vitamin A capsules and a course of zinc supplements among the 140 million undernourished children around the world as the number one investment – it would cost just \$60 million per year yet lead to yearly benefits of over \$1 billion, according to economist Sue Horton, of Wilfrid Laurier Uni -



Susan Horton, Wilfrid Laurier University, Ontario, Canada

versity in Canada. This means that each dollar spent on this program creates benefits (in the form of better health, fewer deaths, increased future earnings, etc.) worth over \$17.

An intervention would involve the use of vitamin A capsules for infants aged under two years, and therapeutic zinc supplement courses for infants aged 6–12 months. This would provide full coverage (two doses) of vitamin A to 80% of children aged two and below in Sub-Saharan Africa (where coverage is currently 73% according to UNICEF) and South Asia (71%); along with two courses of zinc supplements per year for 80% of children in the 6–18 month age group in South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa, where the current coverage is assumed to be essentially zero.

The third-best investment was identified by the economists as micronutrient fortification, specifically salt iodization and fortification of basic food items with iron. Salt iodization provides protection against goiter but, currently, 31% of households in developing countries do not consume iodized salt. An estimated two billion individuals worldwide suffer from iron deficiency, of whom more than half are in South Asia.

Iodization of salt and fortification of basic food-stuffs with iron offer very high benefits for relatively little cost. An annual investment of \$19 million would scale-up salt iodization in the three lagging regions of South Asia, Sub-Saharan Africa, and Central and Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States (50%), as well as enable iron fortification to reach 80% of the population of sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, where the current coverage is assumed to be negligible. The benefits will be in the order of \$570 million. Each dollar spent would result in benefits of more than \$9.

The Copenhagen Consensus brings together the world's top economists to answer the question: If you had an extra \$75 billion to do good in the world, where would you spend it? Organizer and founder Bjorn Lomborg remarked: "It's not very often you get five Nobel Laureates locked up in the same room for four days, talking about the biggest world issues. I hope that the dedication they've put into compiling this unique overview of the best spending options to improve the world will resonate with decision-makers all over the world."

Letters to the Editor

Vision First Programme in Ghana

Dear Sir,

The Vision First Programme (VFP) in Ghana, supported by the Swiss Red Cross in collaboration with the Ghana Health Service and Ghana Red Cross Society, aims to establish a viable and sustainable blindness prevention program that increases capacity to serve the poor.

Over the years, the support has reached over 400,000 people with quality clinical services and over 12,000 with heavily subsidised to absolutely free cataract surgical services in Ghana. In addition, over 18 clinics have been built and over 24 equipped. Over 1,800 skilled



Operating theater

and non-skilled staff have also been trained. In line with its aim of reaching the poor, the Swiss Red Cross currently supports eye care

services in two of the most-deprived regions of Ghana: the Upper West region and the Northern region.