

Special dietary needs: the care and pursuit for equity in health assistance

Special dietary needs are a reality for significant portions of the population in Brazil. However, they remain invisible and / or ancillary in health programs. Developing and assuring qualified care for people with such needs should be seen as key elements to building equity in health care.

Thus, we have had the honor to assemble this issue reserved to the topic “Assistance to special dietary needs in Unified Health System (SUS),” resulting from a partnership between Demetra Magazine, the General Coordination of Food and Nutrition (CGAN) of the Brazilian Ministry of Health and the American Health Organization (PAHO). The purpose is to help overcome the shortage of publications and support managers and professionals on organizing and providing care in SUS for people who have some kind of special dietary needs.

In the production process of this special issue, we had the valuable collaboration of Kelly Poliany de Souza Alves (CGAN), Kimielle Cristina Silva (CGAN) and Ana Carolina Feldenheimer Silva (Pan American Health Organization, Brazil), whose support we immensely appreciate.

We have received 28 papers from different regions of Brazil, including studies, experience reports and assays, carried out by health service professionals (in partnership with

the university or not), researchers, professors and activists. Of these, 13 were shortlisted and 11 completed the review process. The articles gathered deal with the following topics: organization of care in Health Care Networks; epidemiological studies on the diet of individuals with special dietary needs; description and evaluation of innovations in nutritional therapy; formulations for use with alternative feeding; home nutritional therapy; strategies for training and qualification of health professionals; tools, procedures and techniques for care; judicialization of rights to health and nutrition; and subjective and objective questions of people who have special dietary needs.

This special issue, therefore, represents a pioneering effort to systematize what has been produced on this matter in Brazil, in particular in (and to) SUS. There is much to advance on the topics listed above and other, such as: the effectiveness of diets for specific purposes; ethical issues and conflicts of interest when prescribing nutritional formulas; prevalence in local, state or regional conditions that generate special dietary needs; relationships between people with special needs and their caregivers and healthcare professionals. There is also a need to move forward in recording experiences that have built up in several realities in Brazil.

An important step towards overcoming the challenges of this area is to acknowledge special dietary needs as being a transverse and convergent theme, not only in different areas of Nutrition (Clinical, Public Health, Dietetics, Food Science, Food Services), but also in different areas of health. Hopefully this issue will inspire the scaffolding of agendas and the joining of efforts by actors engaged in different areas, including health professional training, production of knowledge and organization of nutritional care in the Brazilian Unified Health System.

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