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# NNEdPro Global Centre for Nutrition and Health

Advancing and implementing nutrition knowledge to improve health, wellbeing and society

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- Strategy Workshop July 10th
- 5th International NNEdPro Summit on Medical and Public Health Nutrition and Research July 11th
- International Society for Nutrigenomics & Nutrigenetics Congress (hosted by NNEdPro) 12th - 13th July

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See our Cambridge University webpages

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## The Online Diet Wars: What is it achieving?

**As two master's level dietetic students, we spend a significant proportion of our time reading academic papers, commentaries and editorials. We are encouraged to critically appraise this work and to engage with the scientific community wherever possible. For many of us, this means social media. Though one might expect the usual scientific rigour and respect usually found in the lab would be found online too, this is not always true.**

We entered the field of dietetics with preconceived ideas of what the profession (and the wider field of healthcare) would be like. Having read about the importance of multidisciplinary teams (MDTs) and the synergy which makes healthcare tick, we imagined a collaborative approach between people with different skills and interests. However, we also expected that everyone would be working toward the common goal of improving people's health. Early on, we discovered the importance of social media, in particular Twitter, as a hub of scientific information, debate and discussion between professionals and academics alike.

However, the realities took us a little by surprise. In our previous experience, Twitter was a place for following sports news, celebrities and local events. Never did we expect that it would be a platform which could hand you a direct line to some of the most well-known and well-respected clinicians and academics in our field. It was exciting to think we could engage in debate with some of the best minds in the business. However, we soon learned that this is not always the case.

Was it naïve to assume that, although people in the field come from different backgrounds and areas of research, they would put their differences aside to consider the bigger picture around coherent public messaging? It's a common occurrence to see a thread arguing the merits of one diet or measurement technique over another. It's equally common to see it descend into ad hominem attacks based on seemingly personal agendas, unwillingness to accept other view points and a refusal to engage in constructive debate around the actual state of research evidence.

Now more than ever, it seems apparent that there is no one-size-fits-all approach when it comes to diet and nutrition. As NNEdPro has pointed out in this very column previously, nutrition at its best is a hard science underpinned by rigorous evidence and there are any number of factors which influence nutrition and its contribution to health outcomes, ranging from genetics, socioeconomic status and environmental determinants. Current online customs are often narrow in their

scope of view, driving a culture of unhelpful competition, none of which ultimately helps the populations we are aiming to serve.

The above said, it would be remiss of us not to utilise such platforms positively for evidence-informed debate around ongoing issues in real-time. For example, the recent EAT-Lancet Commission has sparked many discussions around diet both from a health and environmental point of view. However, we feel that respect as well as responsible writing are paramount.

The field of nutrition and dietetics is a melting pot of individuals from different academic backgrounds, cultures and opinions. It is these differences which make us such a dynamic group and helps us to refine and improve thoughts and ideas. At NNEdPro, we embrace this melting pot, having representatives from the UK to the US and from New Zealand to Nigeria. We hope that over the coming year, through responsible knowledge dissemination we will forge a path that provides better information for the benefit of patients and the public.

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