

Comment on the editorial by Nino Künzli: Happy birthday MPH¹

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Dear editors, dear Dr. Künzli

Congratulations for the editorial by Dr. Künzli on the reality check for the Swiss-German MPH programme. We fully support his view of a need for amendment and we hope your statement will trigger a discussion on this subject. Several of the points you raised are illustrated perfectly by our efforts to make public health nutrition an integral part of the Swiss-German MPH programme, an effort which finally failed in 2000 after many hours of voluntary work.

According to the ASPHER 2001 PEER Review, the current MPH programme complies with international standards. The curriculum, however, needs some revision. In our view, one of the gaps needing to be filled is Public Health (PH) Nutrition. We are not alone in this view. In response to the European Commission, which stated that the greatest potential for improvement of public health in Europe is in the fields of diet and nutrition, a European network for PH Nutrition was created and a pan-European Masters Programme in PH Nutrition developed (see <http://www.prevnut.ki.se>). Its aims are the promotion of good health through nutrition and physical activity, and the prevention of related illness in the general population. Although Switzerland is represented in the European network by the University of Zurich, there was no active Swiss participation with regard to offering one or more modules as part of the European Masters Programme in PH Nutrition. In our view, this opportunity should not be missed, especially since the lack of (PH) Nutrition training in Switzerland has been recognised by leading health professionals and nutritionists such as Prof. Felix Gutzwiller, who recently filed a demand for the advancement of nutrition information, education and training at the Swiss parliament

(02.3135 Mo. Gutzwiller Felix, see <http://www.parlament.ch>). Nutrition is an important part of interdisciplinary health sciences. Therefore, nutrition, food, medical, social, and PH science in Switzerland should be working together to reach the goal of offering training in PH Nutrition in Switzerland. It is surprising and dispiriting that these groups are competing more often than cooperating. Today, only a few experienced PH nutritionists are working in Switzerland. Most of them are women and many work for private companies, which often represent their own consulting services. This small pool of experts acts proactively. An example of this was our task force for development of a module in PH Nutrition. Unfortunately, however, our initiative was finally discouraged by the system of complete voluntarism. We, as many others, cannot afford to subsidise the MPH programme by helping to create a pool of PH nutrition experts without adequate financial support. Experts are needed to plan, manage, carry out, and evaluate programmes such as "5 a day" and "Swiss Balance" initiated and supported by the Swiss Federal Office of Public Health in accordance with the newly developed Swiss nutrition policy. Hopefully, our example will help to support your call for curriculum revision and co-funding by private and public institutions. Happy birthday and good luck MPH!

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¹ Künzli N (2002). Happy birthday MPH: it's time for the party – a reality check and a cure. *Soz Präventiv Med* 47: 279–80.