BOOK REVIEW

Community-Based Prevention: Reducing the Risk of Cancer and Chronic Disease
David McLean, Dan Williams, Sonia Lamont, Hans Krueger. Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press, 2013; 232 pp, CAD $55.00

This book presents community-based prevention programs as long-term sustainable strategies for combating the risk of cancer and chronic diseases. The authors argue that to be most effective, prevention programs must take a comprehensive approach, addressing common risk factors of many chronic diseases. This is achieved through such health strategies as increasing physical activity, improving nutrition, and preventing tobacco use through community engagement, education, and health promotion; the goal of all of these being to generate action and empower the public.

International in scope and divided into three parts, the book: provides context to the importance of these programs and the roles of community-based educators; offers case study examples of existing successful health promotion programs in different countries; and examines strategic components that are crucial to the successful execution of programs. The inclusion of case studies allows for valuable comparison of these programs, highlighting the impact on specific populations, and offering insight into how other programs are run in an attempt to inspire health promotion in other regions. An important contributor to the success of these programs is the focus on smaller, more manageable regions with programs specifically geared to the community’s health needs and special care paid to ethnocultural factors and other social determinants that exist in the community. The authors do examine the generalizability of such programs and the specific factors that must be addressed in tailoring programs to different regions; this is especially necessary where there are multiple risk factors that contribute to illness. These programs incorporate all levels of health promotion, including individual healthy behaviours, factors involved in making healthy choices, and the social determinants of health. However, a challenge with such programs is the time it takes to attain results of preventive efforts, which is why, the authors highlight, it is crucial to have long-term, sustained investment.

The role and impact of community-based educators take centre stage in Community-Based Prevention: Reducing the Risk of Cancer and Chronic Disease. Without the presence of community-based educators, the preventive strategies raised in the book risk healthist moralizing. The authors suggest that these educators are crucial for preventing the displacement of blame onto at-risk individuals, thus protecting the public against this common outcome associated with preventive health care. As such, the intended readers of this book are policy planners and policy-makers interested in establishing or revising chronic disease prevention programs, community program leaders, and others interested in preventive health initiatives. This book may be useful for undergraduate and graduate courses related to health and policy. An important aspect is the avoidance of an overly academic feel in order to help narrow the gap in knowledge translation, which makes it an accessible tool for a broader lay audience.

Partnerships among researchers, health organizations, and the community are important in preventive efforts to establish and act on common goals, and the authors stress that communication and cooperation are essential to identifying needs and ensuring success of targeted programs. This book makes an appeal to health policy-makers to consider community-based prevention education programs in efforts to succeed with broader prevention agendas. As such, the focus on illness prevention in this book is a refreshing response to the often singular focus on reactive health care.

Angela Cowling, MA
York University, Toronto, ON