A Nutritious Issue, but Our Kids Have Problems
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The highlight of this issue of Pediatric Annals is a series of nutrition-based articles well organized by Irwin Benuck, MD, PhD, a general pediatrician with his feet in both a private suburban pediatric practice and at our magnificent new Ann and Robert H. Lurie Children’s Hospital in Chicago. These articles include practical diet-related recommendations for children that should be very useful in providing nutrition-related advice to patients and families.

A SOBERING FUTURE

Speaking of children, my favorite analyst and discussant of surveys, The New York Times op-ed columnist Charles M. Blow, recently reported on a grave statistical portrait of the 2013 US graduating high school class, under the header, “These Children Are Our Future.” This was based upon a report from the research group Child Trends, which presents a pretty depressing if not shocking portrait of our children, which I will summarize here.

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According to the article, it estimates that in a hypothetical class of 100 high school graduates, 71% have been physically assaulted, 28% victimized sexually, including 10% reporting rape, 32% had experienced some form of child mistreatment, 27% had been in a physical fight, and 16% had carried a weapon within the past year. Sixty-four percent had had intercourse, 48% are sexually active, 21% had a sexually transmitted infection in the past year, 3% to 4% of girls have been or are pregnant, and 1% has had an abortion.

Thirty-nine percent have been bullied, 29% felt “sad and hopeless” for at least 2 straight weeks in the past year, 14% seriously considered suicide, and 6% made a suicidal attempt or gesture. Additionally, 34% are overweight, 22% live in poverty, including 10% in “deep poverty.”

This is all very upsetting, of course, and indicates that our society has failed seriously to do all that it can to protect children and to provide a safe environment. Perhaps this problem is somehow linked to the fact that the US stands virtually alone (with only Somalia and South Sudan!) in refusing to ratify the United Nation’s 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child. This seems to reflect at least symbolically a very real lack of concern about the well-being of our future, our children. It is why so many of us take such great care when meeting with our patients or in our research each day, eager to make whatever impact we can while we wait (hopefully not in vain) for global attention to be paid.

ISSUES OF FOOD SAFETY

Turning to my monthly stamps, closely allied to issues related to nutrition, especially in developing countries but also of course in the US and the developed world, are those focused upon by this very colorful souvenir sheet from Mexico. Issued in 2011, it emphasizes “Health and Safety in Mexico.” The focus here is primarily upon food safety, with a glorious depiction of healthy-appearing
nutritious fruits and vegetables below the main title, and animals and seafood across the bottom.

The three individual stamps across the top recognize, at left, Alfonso Luis Herrera López (1886-1942), a pioneer of plant health; at center, more than half a century free of “Fiebre Aftosa,” hoof-and-mouth disease (of cattle); and at right, techniques of insect sterilization by Dieter Enkerlin.

The lower trio of stamps recognize, at left, Good Practices, in the center, Inspection, Verification and Controls, and, at right, Research and Development, all contributing to food safety. As anyone who has read recent headlines about outbreaks of foodborne illness knows, it is essential to have these check and balances in place to ensure the safety of us all.