

## Dietitians Australia 39th National Conference

### LECTURE IN HONOUR OF DR MANNY NOAKES

#### Achieving Impact

(Through Research Translation, Media and Communication)

#### Julie Dundon, Advanced APD

##### Introduction

Manny Noakes is a trailblazer, who accidentally found herself at the centre of media attention to globally promote evidence-based weight loss research. It was not what she had planned or even felt confident with, as she saw herself first and foremost as a scientist. As a research dietitian she grabbed the opportunity to reach the community worldwide.

Manny's work and skill has been recognised by the many awards that have been bestowed on her, including

- 2018 CSIRO Lifetime Research Achievement Award
- 2017 Nomination for Australian of the Year
- 2016 Named in the Top 100 most influential women (SA)
- 2014 Anstey Giles Lecture Award for the Royal Australian College of Surgeons
- 2007 World Food Media Award Total Wellbeing Diet: Category: Best health publication for 2007

In keeping with the theme of the 2022 Dietitians Australia Conference – **be bold**,

Manny's career follows using the sub-themes – nurture, extend and emerge.

Manny Noakes is a **bold** Dietitian who has successfully **nurtured** herself and those around her, **extended** her knowledge and **emerged** with new ways of thinking and working.

##### Beginnings

Manny Noakes (nee Tolari) was born in Tuscany, Italy and immigrated to Australia with her family in 1957 at 4 years of age. With her parents (Franca and Leo), she and her brother Mauro enjoyed the long boat ride from Europe to a migrant camp at Bongegilla in Victoria. Soon after they arrived, they travelled and settled at Immarna in remote South Australia where she describes there were only another 10 houses. She remembers it being very isolated with the desert all around.

In 1958, the family moved to Adelaide where they lived in Queenstown. Her father, a shoemaker by trade, worked at General Motors Holdens and her mother cleaned houses. They both worked hard to give their children future opportunities.

Manny attended Alberton Primary School and Mary McKillop College where English was her second language. During her childhood years, she was aware that her family were different from that of most of her friends. She really wasn't aware of what it actually was, but she just knew she was different, but it didn't seem to bother her.

At high school, Manny excelled at the science subjects and decided that a career in science was her future. Apparently, her mother was very disappointed as she had really hoped Manny would choose the commercial stream and be well prepared for the workforce.

Upon reflection, Manny believes that her interest in food and healthy eating stem from these formative years. Food was and still is a very big part of her Italian culture, and she often enjoyed more food than she needed.

During her teenage years, her mother was concerned about Manny's weight and consulted a number of doctors and Beth Hutton, a very early South Australian Dietitian.

She commenced a Teaching Degree but not long into the course, Manny knew it wasn't for her and withdrew. She commenced a Science Degree and worked at the IMVS as a Scientific Officer (Clinical Chemistry) upon graduation. Her interest in food continued and when in 1972 she found an advertisement for the first Nutrition and Dietetics Course at Flinders University of SA to commence in 1974, she knew that she had to apply.

She was successful and completed the course with other well-known SA dietitians, Anthea Magarey, Mike Davies and Giordana Cross. Amongst her fellow students, her cooking skills were always highly regarded. Manny always had the best cooking outcomes!

During her Dietetics course, Manny included a placement at the Royal Adelaide Hospital. Qualified dietitians were in great demand and Manny went from student one day to a Dietitian the next. She continued to work at the Royal Adelaide Hospital for a further 8 years, enjoying working with individuals in a range of clinical units.

### **Nurturing Years**

From 1977 to 1989, Manny learnt the art of dietetics. She experienced dietetics in a range of settings, in a tertiary teaching hospital, community dietetics, lecturing at university and technical colleges and private practice (pre-Medicare).

During this period, she was seeking the right environment for her career but also juggling family life with 2 sons, Jamie born in 1983 and Simon born in 1985. She was nurturing her career, her sons, her husband and herself.

Manny describes this period as really trying different things to identify her passion. She was prepared to take on part time positions as this suited her family life. But what she really

wanted was a position that had a national focus to influence people's lives more easily and that it had wide reach. She loved working with individuals but knew that the healthy eating message needed a national focus.

### **Extending Years**

In 1989, she was offered a part-time position at the National Heart Foundation (SA Division). She was thrilled to be working for a national organisation and was hoping to make a difference to the wider community's health.

During this time, a colleague, Lynne Cobiac, invited Manny to work as a part time Research Dietitian at CSIRO Health Sciences and Nutrition. She eagerly accepted the position which gave her 2 part-time positions with a young family. This was the beginning of her highly successful CSIRO career.

Whilst working at CSIRO it became evident that Manny had many questions relating to weight management. As a child she had had her own weight battles and really wanted the evidence to inform the community about the benefits of different types of diets.

In 2000 Manny, while working at CSIRO, completed her PhD, *Nutrition and Cardiovascular Disease – Modifications of Foods to Lower Cardiovascular risk in Humans* and continued to explore the health benefits of weight loss on general well-being.

Manny had always been fascinated with food and weight loss and after many discussions with Peter Clifton, he encouraged her to continue to investigate different dietary patterns and their health benefits. Through her continued research, Manny was able to show that by shifting carbohydrate intake to protein the benefits were surprising. This was the beginning of the evolution of The CSIRO Total Wellbeing Diet.

In August 2003, the first version of the CSIRO Total Wellbeing Diet was published in The Women's Weekly as a lift out. Initially Manny was hesitant to do this, but it was consistent

with getting her message out to the wider community. This proved to be the springboard to publish *The Total Wellbeing Diet* after numerous publishers were clamouring to work with her.

At this point, Manny had no inkling of the journey she was about to embark upon. In retrospect, she may have done some things differently, as at times she felt like she was swimming against the tide. Manny realises now that she had not extensively communicated her findings with the general nutrition community and as a result, she received significant criticism. The support from her research community, Dr Peter Clifton, Dr Paul Nestle, Dr Jane Bowen, Dr Gilly Hendrie, Dr Grant Brinkworth and the numerous emails from members of the public that had their weight and health transformed kept her on her mission.

### **Emerging years**

Since 2007 Manny took up leadership roles at CSIRO which included Research Program Director, Theme Leader and Senior Principal Research Scientist, all in the areas of Obesity, Food, Nutrition. Manny was instrumental in continuing obesity research and her work with the Total Wellbeing Diet provided the funding to place nutrition at a high priority in the organisation.

She managed a budget of more than \$20 million and a diverse portfolio of research with staff in both Adelaide and Sydney. Areas of research included clinical nutrition, behavioural consumer sensory science, food and health technology, genomics, and DNA technology. She was also actively involved in engaging staff in understanding the innovation process and demonstrating how science and commercial development may work in synergy to achieve impact

Working across these diverse scientific areas, she was able to build capability quantifying the role of food consumption on the environmental impact metrics for Australia.

Undoubtedly, Manny's most notable achievement is the development and release of the CSIRO Total Wellbeing Diet which was launched in 2004 and has sold over 1 million copies. The CSIRO Total Wellbeing Diet was recognised by winning several awards including the World Food Media Award under the category of Best Health Publication. In 2015, The CSIRO Total Wellbeing Diet was commercialised to an online program and now has an estimated reach of more than five million across all media.

It was never Manny's intention to attract media attention however the world was hungry for quality weight loss advice. Manny needed to very quickly learn to deal with the public and media attention. It was definitely out of her comfort zone, but she knew that this was the way to spread the dietary advice to large numbers of people that she had always wanted.

Through her media work she met many leaders including Julie Bishop, Brendan Nelson and many media personalities with numerous appearances on live television. Manny always provided insightful and straightforward responses and gained the media's respect.

During this time, Manny was a member of numerous Committees and Advisory Boards, including the

- Federal Government Food and Health Dialogue
- Food Standards Australia New Zealand Health Claims Committee
- Woolworths Healthier Australia taskforce
- National Committee for Nutrition; Australian Academy of Science
- National Heart Foundation Food and Nutrition Advisory Committee

Since her retirement from CSIRO, she has continued her influence on food supply by providing strategic and scientific advice to a range of companies, large and small, on innovation opportunities in food product development, health and wellness applications.

Manny has been recognised personally for her work by being awarded numerous awards. Today, Dietitians Australia are pleased to add another Award to the list for Manny, The Lecture in Honour 2022.