

LETTER

Il “Five-A-Day” e il Med-Food Anticancer Program

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Sir:

While perusing the Report PASSI – Apulia 2011/2014 (PASSI is the Italian behavioral risk factors surveillance system), we reflected about the graph illustrating the people who reach “five-a-day” (1). In particular, we noticed that, within the Local Health Authority of Foggia (LHA-FG), the percentage of individuals who reach the “five-a-day” has almost tripled compared to the PASSI 2007-2010 surveillance period, rising from a modest 6.2% to 17.3% (2). The latter rate is well above even the national average, as well as the regional one, both stuck at 10% .

We didn’t believe our eyes, and to be sure not to “exchange fireflies for lanterns” we approached the authors of the report, who confirmed the leap.

A thorough comparative study, particularly from a statistical point of view is needed, in order to identify the underlying causes. And this could be the subject of a work to be published soon in the scientific literature.

However, when the differences are of such a magnitude, we believe that it is not very risky to observe what has changed regarding the practices of LHA-FG, and ascribe to the Med-Food Anticancer Program (MFAP) some credits. We recall that the main objective of the MFAP is the “five-a-day” (3, 4) and, in the period 2011-2016, the Food and Nutrition Hygiene Service (FNHS) has implemented MFAP in all the district areas of LHA-FG, involving about 20,000 persons. This was made possible thanks to the resources allocated for the realization of MFAP by Regione Puglia (5) and LHA-FG (6), with respectively 400,000 € and 82,700 €.

Also please consider the MFAP’s programme presentation in various scientific forums:

- Naples 22nd September 2010, the 3rd National Congress “Qualità del Suolo, Alimenti e Salute” (lit.: “Quality of soil, food and health”);

- Bari 14th May 2011, Apulian-Lucanian Congress of the Italian Society of Hygiene and Preventive Medicine;

- Rome 14th October 2011, at the 12th Conference of Public Health organized by SItI;

- Bologna 3rd October 2013, at the Conference “Prevenire I tumori mangiando”, (lit.: “Preventing cancers by eating”), where the team of FNHS LHA-FG held the training for FNHS operators in Emilia Romagna.

“The Manual for practitioners” (3) has been published for what concerns the methodology of conducting MFAP, while on the *Annali di Igiene* (Ann Ig) the study and a short note (7-8) were published. Finally, we want to invoke the acknowledgement of Jeremiah Stamler, a professor of the Chicago University and father of the Mediterranean diet along with Ancel Keys, and Michele Conversano, National President of the Italian Society of Hygiene and Preventive Medicine, at the Seminar of Foggia MFAP of 4th February 2014, on the occasion of World Cancer Day.

This year marks the 10th anniversary of MFAP, and FNHS of LHA-FG has organized several events in Foggia: on the 2nd of February the “Seminar on the Nutritional Prevention of Cancer”, which saw the participation of the directors of FNHS of the LHA of Catania, the LHA of Caserta, the LHA of Bologna and the LHA of Foggia; on the 4th of February, for the World Cancer day, the seminar “Med-Food Fest” and, the following day, the first collective walk meaningfully entitled “Prevention Against Cancer Is Forever.”

This little story of MFAP demonstrates that public health interventions to change lifestyles can be effective and, as Rodolfo Saracci wrote in the presentation of the book by Michael Marmot (9): “In the presence of evidence that demonstrates the effectiveness of the interventions (wherever they have been made), these should be considered and reproduced as a matter of principle and they must, therefore, be undertaken for their implementation where feasibility conditions appear better: whether it is a national, regional, local scale is secondary, the priority is that interventions are activated”.

The challenge for the MFAP, therefore, is the revival in other contexts: the FHNS of LHA of Bologna, for example, since 2014 is implementing the MFAP and the early results will be published shortly. This could be the first step for the validation of MFAP reproducibility.

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