
The Flora Project for Heart Disease Prevention: 25th anniversary

Abstract

In celebration of the 25th anniversary of The Flora Project for Heart Disease, outlines the work of the project, including literature, sponsorship, activities, nutritional analyses and research projects.

The Flora Project for Heart Disease Prevention marked its 25th anniversary in November with a celebratory dinner at the Science Museum. The dinner was attended by 100 guests from academic bodies, the media, industry and health professionals.

The Flora Project for Heart Disease Prevention was founded in 1970 as a service for health professionals, providing them with the help and resources required to educate the general public about coronary heart disease. Over the years, the Project's work with individuals and organizations, and its commitment to public concerns and scientific developments, have earned it a high level of support and loyalty from health professionals.

The work of the Flora Project encompasses a broad range of activities, the best known of which is the provision of literature on the prevention of coronary heart disease (CHD). Since its inception 25 years ago, the Flora Project has distributed approximately 100 million pieces of free literature, on request, to health professionals.

Some of the most popular resources are the lifestyle risk factor leaflets which look at smoking, stress, exercise, blood pressure, weight and food choices and how making changes in these areas can help to prevent heart disease. Other resources currently available include training videos for health professionals, teaching materials for schools and leaflets on the importance of the anti-oxidant vitamins in preventing heart disease.

The Flora Project has carried out a number of activities involving children and education. In 1984 a secondary school teaching pack was produced on nutrition and health. As educational needs changed, and in order to fully integrate with the changing national curriculum, a primary school teaching pack, "Live it Up", was produced in 1993. This was reviewed by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food; the Department of Health; and the Rowett Research Institute for its scientific content and is endorsed by the National Association of Teachers of Home Economics and Technology (NATHE). Each pack contains information on nutrition and health and comprises workcards which can be photocopied, games, individual projects and group activities. The activities are also listed according to their role in attaining the National Curriculum targets.

In 1992 the Flora Project undertook a three-year sponsorship of the cub and scout cooking badge. One activity which took place that year

was the creation of the “Good Hearted Sandwich”. This, the UK’s biggest ever sandwich, was 700ft long, 10in wide and 4in deep and was made to celebrate Good Hearted Sandwich Day. The fillings were put together by cub scouts from around the UK and celebrities, including Anton Mosimann, Prue Leith, Anna Ford, Raymond Blanc and Glenda Jackson, all contributed their favourite recipes. Money was raised for charity by selling 10ft sections of the sandwich to sponsors; the unsold sections were then donated to charities for the homeless in London.

In 1994 a healthy eating booklet was developed to help cub scouts prepare for and attain this badge. A number of activities around this sponsorship also took place. That summer an “It’s a Flora Knockout” competition took place at the Cub Scouts and Beaver Cubs Annual Fun Day. Over 15,000 cub scouts from all over the UK attended this event. At Christmas the same year, cub scouts preparing for their cooking badge helped cook 100 Christmas puddings which were donated to Crisis at Christmas, the charity for homeless people.

In 1994 the Flora Project carried out a nutritional analysis of children’s diets in the UK. A dietary survey took place of school-children around the UK and the results were published in *She* magazine. Regional breakdowns of the data were also made available both to the schools which had been involved and to the local media. In 1995 the survey was repeated; this highlighted the poor quality of children’s diets in some areas. The results from 1995 are currently being submitted for publication in a peer review journal.

As part of its ongoing programme of furthering the understanding of CHD, the Flora Project has taken many health journalists on study trips around the world. Most recently a group visited Holland in 1994 to compare the wartime diet in the UK and Holland and the effect of poor maternal nutrition on the health outcome of the mothers’ babies. Previously, visits were made to Jamaica, looking at the rising incidence of heart disease in The Caribbean; Washington, to a conference on cholesterol and blood pressure control; and Berlin, where a comparison was made between CHD incidence in Eastern and Western Europe. These trips provide an opportunity for national journalists to experience emerging science first-hand and stimulate discussion and interest back here in the UK.

For health professionals, the Flora Project attends a number of exhibitions each year at which free resources and information can be obtained. This also provides an opportunity for face-to-face discussions and for any queries or problems to be answered by our nutritional advisers. In recent years the Flora Project has run workshops for practice nurses and occupational health nurses nationwide and, in 1994, held three seminars for dietitians on the antioxidant vitamins and their importance in lipid metabolism and coronary heart disease. In November 1995 the Flora Project supported the Economic and Social Research Council in presenting their interim results on the nation’s diet to a wide audience.

The Flora Project has funded a number of research projects into CHD. Research grants have been awarded through the BDA and in 1991 and 1992 a nutrition prize was awarded in conjunction with the Rowett Research Institute and The Nutrition Society. The Flora Project also sponsored the 1994 GP Practice of the Year with GP magazine and *Good Housekeeping*. This was won by a practice in Northern Ireland which used part of the prize money to buy equipment for monitoring heart disease.

Heart disease is still the biggest killer of both men and women in the UK causing approximately one-quarter of all deaths in the population. However, the situation is improving and there has been a decrease in the incidence of CHD over the last 25 years. Despite the rapidly changing world of science and technology, medical advice on prevention of CHD has remained remarkably consistent for the last 30 years. This advice is that we should cut down on our total intake of fats, especially saturated fats, take more exercise and stop smoking. The Flora Project’s work supports the Government’s *Health of the Nation* document through the provision of health education literature for health professionals and the general public. These messages are the core factors in all Flora Project activities and Dr John Brown, Scientific Director of the Flora Project, comments:

It’s nice to think that our activities may have contributed in some way to a reduction in CHD of more than 20 per cent over the last 25 years, and to hope that our efforts over the next 25 can have a similar, if not greater, impact.

If you would like more information about the Flora Project or any of its activities please contact us on 0171 242 0936.