I attended the 28th National Conference of the Dietitians Association of Australia (DAA) with the grant I received from the Faculty of Medicine, Nursing and Health Sciences. The DAA is the leading professional organisation for dietitians in Australia. Their annual conference provides an opportunity for dietitians from across the country to come together and explore and learn about issues related to practice and the profession.

The theme of the conference was 'Next generation nutrition: Innovative solutions'. As a current 4th year student dietitian I am part of the 'next generation' of allied health care workers whose role it will be to implement 'innovative solutions' to solve nutrition issues. Consequently, I found the content presented by key note speakers, at promotional stands and addressed in small group sessions to be relevant and stimulating. I am now aware of the nutrition and health problems anticipated for the future and I can consider this I'm my future practice.

One of the main focus areas of the Conference was foods of the future. Presentations by key note speakers illustrated the progressive foods we can expect to see in the future, including 'functional foods' and 'super foods'.

A hypothetical discussion topic 'what will be eating in 2050' was facilitated by Paul Willis and featured a discussion panel including well known dietitian Rosemary Stanton. This entertaining, thought provoking discussion accurately captured the issues we will be facing in the future and the implications on all arenas of life. It considered how food, nutrition and health would be affected as we experience a population increase, saturation of urban living, significant environmental concerns, technological advances, developments in the food industry and changes to taxing and government regulations. This hypothetical presentation was broadcast on 'Big Idea's' on ABC1 and can be viewed at http://www.abc.net.au/tv/bigideas/stories/2010/06/15/2927258.htm.

There were two scenarios presented to represent the situation we could be facing in the future. The first scenario suggested that a boom in the food industry would pave the way to a plethora of processed superfoods and functional foods which would be a main component of daily food intake. Dietitians work in the food industry developing new and improved food products. Technology allows us to calculate our daily nutrient requirements and suggest a meal pattern to enable us to eat what we need to combat health problems. We would be purchasing our foods from large chain supermarkets and eating our dinner prepared by food service kitchens operating in the high rise apartments where we live. This paints a picture where external organisations have significant influence and control over our food intake.

On the other hand, the second scenario had a more environmentally friendly, natural approach. In this picture, all schools had community gardens and a dietitian, fruit trees lined the nature strip, people shopped at farmers markets and grew their own food to share and all food and human waste materials were recycled to generate useful products. We consume a range of diverse foods due to the increase in multiculturalism. We all work together to ensure that we take care of our health and our environment and these behaviours are encouraged from a young age. The key aspects of this scenario are sustainability, self sufficiency and community cooperation.

In the future years it will be interesting to monitor the changes occurring in the food industry, the health system and the community to determine what path we are heading down and what, in fact, we will actually be eating in 2050. I believe that dietitians will play a role in shaping food and nutrition for the future and I look forward to my role in this.