Short Message Service for Optimal Nutrition

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About the speaker  
Dr. Mu Li is an Associate Professor and Academic Program Coordinator in international public health at the Sydney School of Public Health, and Director of Public Health Strategic Program, China Studies Centre, University of Sydney. She is a recipient of the Endeavour Executive Fellowship Award 2014 from the Australian Government. Dr Li’s major teaching and research interests are in public health nutrition include micronutrient deficiencies, childhood obesity prevention and public health program evaluation. She played key roles in the Australia-China technical collaboration on Iodine Deficiency Disorders Elimination in China and Iodine Deficiency Disorders Elimination project in Tibet. She is the current board member of the International Council for the Control of Iodine Deficiency Disorders/Global Network.

About the lecture  
Infant feeding practices can have long-term effects on children and their adulthood health and wellbeing. Among many benefits, children who are breastfed have lower levels of obesity than those who were formula fed. Advances in communication technologies have opened new possibilities for innovative health service delivery and public health interventions. mHealth is using mobile phone devises to improve adherence to health advice, increase access to health information, and to promote healthy behaviour. One of the fastest growing applications of mHealth is mobile short message service (SMS), whereby health promotion and relevant health information messages are sent directly to targeted recipients. We conducted a pilot study in Shanghai, aimed to develop and implement a community-based health promotion intervention to provide staged advice and support for breastfeeding (BF) and infant feeding (IF) through SMS to expecting and new mothers to test the feasibility and acceptability. The results are very encouraging; demonstrated by a high retention rate and improved feeding practices: increased duration of exclusive breastfeeding for children younger than 6 months and decreased introducing complementary feeding to infants before 4 months of age. Using text message to promote breastfeeding is well accepted and feasible in Shanghai. This could be a model for culturally-acceptable healthy infant feeding and childhood obesity prevention in other countries undergoing rapid socio-economic and nutrition transitions like China.