

## REPORT ON NUTRITION EDUCATION IN MEDICAL FACULTIES

Recommended by the International Union of Nutritional Sciences  
Committee (V-1) on Nutrition Education in Medical Faculties\*

Meetings of Committee V-1 were held in Tunis to discuss and to prepare a report relevant to the aims and plans of this Committee of IUNS. The Committee intends to submit evidence concerning the urgent need to include the teaching of nutrition in the education of medical undergraduates and postgraduates in Schools of Medicine all over the world and wishes to make the practical proposals presented at the end of this Report.

The Committee has examined available reports on schemes on nutrition teaching in Medical Faculties and has found that – compared to the situation in 1969 (see report of this Committee of 2 September, 1969, Prague) – certain interesting developments have occurred which promise well for the future. They will be presented in full in the extensive report which is being prepared. It suffices to say that certain Medical Centres have or are producing a syllabus for the teaching of nutrition.

Thus, for instance, more recently the Nutrition Division of the Department of Community Medicine, Mount Sinai School of Medicine, New York, has a comprehensive programme of nutrition teaching of medical students. Cambridge University is introducing a nutrition teaching programme in their new Clinical Curriculum, a pregraduate clinical course lasting 2 years. At Cambridge there is also a Post-graduate Diploma Course in Nutrition run by a Committee representing the Faculties of Medicine, Biology A and B (including Departments of Medicine, Veterinary Medicine, Agriculture, Biochemistry, Physiology and a number of Research Institutes). Furthermore, it has been announced that in the Federal Republic of Germany a regulation for the medical examination (Approbationsordnung) has been introduced in October 1970 by the Federal Ministry of Health, in which nutrition is an item on the list of obligatory examination questions for the examination in certain disciplines. This new development will obviously increase the amount of attention given to nutrition teaching, both by the teaching staff and by the student.

Nevertheless, the Committee felt that on the whole education in nutrition in most Schools of Medicine is not adequate. It recommends that medical students and

\*Comments on this Report, approved by the IUNS at their Conference in Tunis, 21-26 January 1971, may be sent to any member of the IUNS Committee V-1:

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medical graduates should be kept informed of the great advances in nutritional sciences which have occurred in recent years, since it considers it an essential duty of the medical man to be a contributor in preventive public health nutritional measures, as well as to use up-to-date nutritional knowledge in the treatment of nutritionally-dependent disease. The importance of nutrition in conditions of physiological stress, e.g. in growth, pregnancy and lactation, or after injury etc., is of primary interest to the medical profession. This includes also diseases of public health importance having dietary components, e.g. coronary heart disease, obesity, etc. 'It is doubtful if this knowledge is sufficiently incorporated in the medical curriculum and it appears that many medical students graduate with an inadequate knowledge of nutrition' (*FAO/WHO Report on Nutritional Education in Six Western European Countries*, 1961, p.13). The Council in Foods and Nutrition of the American Medical Association stated that 'in general, medical education and medical practice have not kept abreast of the tremendous advances in nutritional knowledge. A recent survey on Nutrition teaching in Medical Schools indicated that there is inadequate recognition, support and attention given to this subject in Medical Schools' (*J. Am. med. Ass.*, 1963, **183**, 955). A similar statement was included in the Memorandum of The Nutrition Society in Great Britain to the UK Royal Commission on Medical Education (*Proc. Nutr. Soc.*, 1967, **26**, 141). Identical conclusions were reached more recently by WHO (*WHO Seminar on Nutrition Training in Medical Schools of the Mediterranean Countries*, December, 1970).

Since nutrition is a multidisciplinary science, the Committee suggests that nutritional teaching should be introduced in its correct context both at preclinical and clinical level. This is best organized and most effective in the form of a separate integrated course led by an individual who holds a Chair in Nutrition. However, so far as this is at present not available in all Institutions, an individual or a small expert committee should have the authority within the Medical School to propose an integrated teaching programme in nutrition which would cover the efforts of various departments at preclinical and clinical level. The essential point in the organization of such teaching should be an over-all plan to ensure dissemination of nutritional knowledge throughout the entire medical curriculum in a co-ordinated manner. The establishment of a Department of Nutrition is the most efficient and logical way to ensure this aim. In this way unnecessary replication may be avoided while important interdisciplinary relationships can be emphasized. The Committee recommends, therefore:

- (1) that the physiological and biochemical basis of nutrition is taught in the pre-clinical years;
- (2) that the pathology and therapy of nutritionally induced disease is taught in the clinical years;
- (3) that the public health and community medicine aspects of nutrition should be an integral component of the medical curriculum;
- (4) that clinical nutrition and preventive or therapeutic dietetics are presented to the medical student in such a manner that he can make use of this knowledge in medical practice;

(5) that active efforts are made to support postgraduate education which would keep the practising physician informed of advances in nutritional knowledge and would also provide information of a more specialized kind, e.g. in the form of symposia or courses on nutritional problems in their own country or on nutritional medical practice in developing or tropical countries;

(6) that a Medical School should place authority in an individual or committee, or preferably found a Chair of Nutrition, with responsibility to propose an integrated and full teaching programme in nutrition, which would cover the efforts of various departments;

(7) since the recommendations cited above are necessarily of a long-term nature and since they are unlikely to be implemented fully in the near future, despite their urgency and desirability, the Committee urges the Council of the IUNS to take measures which would be in partial fulfilment of our aims.

The Committee therefore further recommends:

that the Council of the IUNS should sponsor, facilitate and arrange financial support of about five to six postgraduate students, to be called IUNS Fellows, to attend special courses in nutrition (diploma etc.) so that these Fellows who would come from both industrialized and developing countries would become themselves teachers in nutritional sciences as medical nutritionists, acceptable to Medical Schools. An approved list of training centres willing to perform such a task should be made and financial backing found from outside sources. Every effort would have to be made by both the granting body, e.g. IUNS, and the Medical School to assure a suitable position in the Medical Faculty for the returning scholar.

This would ensure a continuous succession of enthusiastic young well-trained nutritionists who would enhance the nutrition education in their respective Medical Schools.