Problems of the nutritionist in obtaining information

By BEE NILSON, *The Northern Polytechnic, Holloway, London, N7*

The information required is for teaching human nutrition to students taking either Institutional Management courses, the Post-Graduate Diploma in Dietetics, or the Royal Society of Health Diploma in Nutrition in Relation to Catering Management.

Information is required on the following:

(1) Research in all aspects of human nutrition.
(2) Advances in food technology and their effect on the nutritive value of foods.
(3) Advances in medicine related to diseases treated by diet therapy.
(4) Developments in catering and cooking techniques and their possible effect on the nutritive value of food served.
(5) Results of dietary surveys, their significance and their bearing on the teaching of nutrition.
(6) Social surveys concerned with living conditions, especially of vulnerable groups.
(7) Dietary problems of other countries. Many different countries are likely to be represented among the students.
(8) The chemical composition of new foods, for both normal diets and diet therapy.
(9) Changes in food laws which affect the composition of foods.
(10) Current public health problems.
(11) Current economic problems and their effect on the availability and price of food.
(12) Advances in techniques of communication, including methods of education.

The main problems encountered in keeping up to date are lack of time for reading the large number of journals it is necessary to consult to cover such a variety of information necessary for the teaching of practical nutrition, and the difficulty of assessing the significance of the information.

The dissemination of misinformation: a growing problem

By JOHN MCKENZIE, *Office of Health Economics, 162 Regent Street, London, W1*

It is true that on occasions deliberate evasion or distortion of truth causes misunderstanding, but we should not overemphasize this source of difficulty. Government legislation, control by industrial associations and advertising authorities ensure an ever-increasing strict control.

Most misinterpretations of the facts are caused by one or more of the following:
(a) An oversimplification of scientific principles because of attempts to make them comprehensible to the layman. For example, we talk of body-building foods instead

of protein, and energy-giving foods instead of carbohydrate. Initially such a technique may provide a graphic description for the layman, but in the long run as a result of it people may imagine that high-protein foods do not contain calories, and that without sugar we would lack energy.

(b) A misinterpretation of what has been said or written. One sentence from a balanced statement taken out of context, or a misunderstanding of the overall philosophy behind a research publication, may lead to total misjudgment of the conclusion.

(c) The publication of inadequate research which is accepted for more than its worth.

(d) The time lag between the initial production of research findings and their general publication. For example, it might take 10 years or more between the unearthing of a new fact and its appearance in a text book.

(e) The role of the judgment factor in nutrition. The subject is in many ways a deductive one, involving the subjective valuation of objective criteria. As such, human fallibility may lead to the wrong conclusion.

(f) The difficulty of defining who is an expert in a field so close to human life, where everybody regards themselves and even calls themselves experts on food.

The solution lies in teaching people how to look for information, and how critically to assess its value rather than in simply giving them facts which is what so often occurs. Perhaps also organizations such as The Nutrition Society need to make authoritative statements to the press and the other media which can stand against, and even positively attack, the well-publicized views of the charlatan.

Keeping up to date in nutrition: Chairman's summary of the discussion

By S. K. KON, 151 *The Warren, Caversham, Reading*

By arranging today's colloquium, The Nutrition Society offered to its members a type of meeting novel for them, though well known and popular in other scientific societies.

Time alone will tell whether such informal exchanges of views on specialized topics of current interest, at which brief papers by invited speakers provide a strutting for general discussion, will find lasting favour with our members. There is no doubt that this particular meeting appealed to many: not only was the attendance so large that the venue had to be moved from the Sir John Atkins Laboratories to the main hall of Queen Elizabeth College, but some thirty people took part during a crowded 90 minutes in a lively debate between the paper readers sitting as a panel and members of the audience speaking from the floor.

Though neither panel nor audience was agreed on the imminence and dangers of an information explosion, the view seemed to prevail that what is a swelling torrent of papers in one discipline may only be a sluggish stream in another, and that fashions chop and change. With the science (or art) of nutrition, the rate of publi-