

## Editorial

### Education and Training in Nutrition

**D**URING the last decade or two, food and nutrition have emerged and were recognized as prominent environmental factors in shaping the destiny of both countries and individuals. We are becoming increasingly aware of the frightening deterioration of nutritional conditions in large parts of the population in all too many developing countries. In a recent Editorial<sup>1</sup> published in *Science*, J. G. Harrar, President of the Rockefeller Foundation, has referred to the "Unhappy Paradox": "With the knowledge and tools now available to society for the satisfaction of agricultural requirements, it seems paradoxical that a large proportion of the world's population lives at substandard nutritional levels." He and his correspondents<sup>2,3</sup> have rightly pointed out that what is lacking and sorely needed is *education* and *training* in nutrition. But they have no illusion as to the long and arduous course, without the possibility of rapid progress.

In highly developed countries, we are facing other complications: In contrast to the well developed modern agricultural science, detached present day knowledge in the purely nutritional field has not generally permeated the population, not even its medical guild, to an extent which in principle would and should be attainable.

<sup>1</sup> HARRAR, J. G., *Science* 133: 671, 1961.

<sup>2</sup> SALMON, S. C., *Science* 134: 298, 1961.

<sup>3</sup> LOWENSTEIN, M. D., *Science* 134: 298, 1961.

In the United States nutritional knowledge is disseminated chiefly through the Departments of Animal Husbandry and Home Economics. Only a very few independent departments of nutrition are found in Schools of Public Health. In medical schools nutritional problems are discussed in the departments of physiology, biochemistry or in clinical departments, in most instances without special planning or proper coordination. The net result is a weak grasp and appreciation of nutrition and its scientific foundation. It is no wonder that, in turn, patients often do not receive the proper nutritional advice and that they, as well as their physicians, fall prey to food faddism, often in its excessive manifestations.

One possible remedy would be a slight change in medical education: One member of the medical faculty (undergraduate or graduate) with special interest and proved accomplishments in the nutritional field should be named as coordinator of nutritional teaching. This teaching could best and preferably be done within the frame of well organized "panel discussions" on which representatives of several relevant departments could participate. This suggestion is not new; it has been carried out recently in several medical schools, but it should be put on a regular and general basis. A special Chair for Nutrition, apart from Schools of Public Health, is not a necessity and preferably should be avoided. Nutrition in its

purely medical aspects is not, and should not be confined to any specialty. In a given undergraduate or graduate medical school, it may find its leading proponent in any of the basic science or clinical departments. It would be a mistake to attempt narrow limitations which might act as an undesirable brake on nutritional research in the different basic and clinical departments.

In recent years short postgraduate courses in nutrition given for physicians in practice proved to be valuable.

In the so-called developing countries the over-all problem is more complicated. Here, there is a need for agricultural extension, community development, and maternal and child health services, branching out into villages and even to single families or at least to a group of families. In many countries there are no or few well trained nutritionists. Laboratory facilities are often lacking or inadequate. The UN agencies, WHO, FAO, UNICEF and UNESCO, have been putting increasing emphasis on education and training in nutrition in developing countries. In this respect, without going into details, only a few guide lines should be mentioned for a possible approach to such education and training, considering again mainly the medical aspects of nutrition, in developing countries, especially in those which lack fully adequate facilities. Priority should be given to the education and training of prospective leaders in nutritional science and practice. In developing countries, problems of public health in its relation to nutrition are of paramount importance. Thus, education and training could be accomplished with greatest benefit in well qualified Institutes of Nutrition in Schools of Public Health, with appropri-

ate facilities for field exercise. However, developing countries also need biochemists, pediatricians, internists and obstetricians with adequate nutritional knowledge. Such opportunities may be found in medical schools with well coordinated programs in nutrition. The training should cover two or three years or more. The trainees should be permitted to bring their families with them. The preceptors must maintain close contact with the trainees and should be careful not to alienate them from their own culture and problems. On the contrary, they should stimulate in the trainees the idealistic, dedicated spirit to promote welfare, progress and science in their countries. Only after their return to their home countries will real practical training be achieved.

In developing countries with qualified nutritionists, technical personnel may be trained by them. In a given country, one or two nutritional advisers from abroad may also be useful for one or two years. However, the risks of antagonizing the local medical-scientific profession or government officials are great. Diplomatic tact, due regard for human sensitiveness, understanding and dedication are essential attributes for a successful foreign nutritional adviser. In many instances, short-term consultants may establish close and helpful relations, especially through repeat visits. However, one should never forget that "a way of life cannot be taught, it can only be lived."<sup>3</sup>

In many parts of the world, it is close to midnight. Urgent action is the categorical imperative of the day.

PAUL GYÖRGY, M.D.

*President*

*American Institute of Nutrition  
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania*

*The Editorial Board of this Journal solicits the comments and opinions of its readers to the proposals outlined in Dr. György's editorial. Specific suggestions would be especially appreciated. The most interesting and significant will be published.*

