

# Letters to the Editor

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## Teaching and Training in Nutrition

Dear Sir:

I have read with much interest Dr. György's editorial, "Education and Training in Nutrition," in the January issue of the *Journal*. He has made an excellent statement of the needs in this area and of steps which might be taken to improve medical education accordingly. I should like to make some further comments on the training needed by nutritional scientists for work in developing countries.

The science of nutrition deals with the body's needs for calories and specific nutrients for the maintenance and improvement of health. It must also deal with the problem of meeting these needs through an appropriate food supply. In developing countries this problem is of paramount importance because the food supplies are limited both quantitatively and qualitatively, in contrast to the situation in our own country, and because the dietary patterns are quite different from our own.

First of all, efforts must be made to make more effective use of the food supply as produced. This calls for food conservation measures. It has been estimated that, of the total world production (except U.S.S.R.) of 856 million metric tons of grain in 1958, the loss because of improper storage would have been sufficient to feed 300 million people for one year. Better food conservation measures on the farm, in commercial processing and distribution and in the home, through appropriate technological procedures, deserve high priority in an over-all nutrition program. *One cannot expect nutritional scientists to be given detailed training in food technology, but their education should give them a full appreciation of the roles it can play in advancing the cause of nutrition. They can, in turn, assist food technologists in activities which will best serve this objective.*

Dietary improvement in developing countries

also calls for an increased food supply and, frequently, a betterment of its nutritional quality. While the increased production here required is primarily the job of agricultural scientists, the nutritional scientist who has appropriate knowledge of the nutrient content of food crops, as well as of nutritional needs, can offer guidance as to how production programs can be geared to these needs, in terms of the dietary pattern and food habits of the population in question. To exert an effective influence in these directions, the nutritional scientist must have some appreciation of the factors such as soil, climate, disease and pests, which must be taken into account in deciding whether a particular crop can be successfully grown in a given area. He cannot be expected to obtain detailed training in agriculture but he should gain an understanding of its problems in the production of food crops to meet nutritional needs.

I believe that in the education of nutritional scientists for work in developing countries, whether carried out in schools of public health or some other unit of a university, the training in the physiological and medical aspects of nutrition should be appropriately supplemented by training in the related roles of food science here discussed.

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Dear Editors:

I should like you to consider my reply to Dr. György's editorial which appeared in your *Journal* in January of this year.

I agree with Dr. György that nutrition has not reached the masses even in this country and that it is an illusion to think of improving

the nutriture of the world as anything but a long and arduous task.

As he implies, a partial reason for our dilemma has been our failure in medical education. Perhaps we have overspecialized in medicine to the point where the surgeon thinks of nutrition in terms of electrolyte balance, the pediatrician in terms of the infant dietary, the researcher in terms of the biochemical abnormality of the disease process which he is studying.

*A pertinent question is what constitutes education and training in nutrition. Or perhaps, what does the medical specialist need to know to be a nutrition educator?*

Certainly the educator needs to know his audience. He needs to know their habits, their intelligence, their motivations, their economy, their human drives and needs. He must be able to identify with the recipient to the extent that he well understands what will make for acceptance of his teaching. Certainly the medical educator needs to know facts. Some of these facts are a workable knowledge of food values, nutritional needs, food products, dietary content. How can he teach without this? This is not difficult to learn, nor is it an endless labyrinth of trivia. The teaching of these facts to the medical educator should be accomplished in a concise, organized manner. In other words, the medical student should have guided direction in teaching nutrition to his patients and to other lay groups.

Coordination of nutrition teaching in medical schools *should* be encouraged. One wonders if the statement made by Dr. György that "nutrition in its purely medical aspects is not a speciality" is really true. Nutrition research and teaching should be developed in basic science and clinical departments. But should this preclude the establishment of a nutrition speciality, directed and developed by competent personnel whose primary interest is the science and application of nutrition and whose secondary interest is medicine?

And who to fill this chair in nutrition? As a former student of the late Dr. Kate Daum, I can think of no more suitable candidates than the present day or the would-be Kate

Daum's who could bring so much to medicine.

Our problems in this country can be solved partially through recruitment. This means recruitment of professionally qualified nutritionists, nutrition-minded physicians, competent dietitians and nutrition educators. A large supply of these personnel could and should be graduates of recognized nutrition departments in Home Economics. Perhaps Home Economics will have to look toward intensifying its professional curriculum and toward the more active solicitation of funds to finance graduate education so essential in providing the educators and researchers.

By all means encourage prospective leaders from foreign countries to study in the United States and elsewhere. Let's help them through financial and moral support to learn what we hope to be able to teach better in the future (through our own self-improvement program). For if they are prepared to teach, they certainly will do a much better job of it than we in their own countries. We should not hope to reach physically beyond our borders until we have provided adequately for the lay and professional needs here.

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Dear Dr. György:

Your editorial "Education and Training in Nutrition" in the January, 1962 issue of *A.J.C.N.* brought to mind a sentence in the last paragraph of Graham Lusk's *Nutrition* in the *Clio Medica* series: "Even in medical schools little thought is given to the subject."

It has been gratifying to see that some progress has been made since Lusk's time, but I agree with you that the subject is still handled in a diffuse fashion and that urgent action is needed. Public health nutritionists are especially aware that some physicians "fall prey to food faddism," probably as the result of inadequate information on which to evaluate diets that appear in popular magazines and books.

I was pleased also to note that you, like