

This sterility makes some retrieval problems less difficult, but the need to sift the small amount of valuable new information from the mountain of useless chaff remains.

Human nutrition; the information requirements of a Government department

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The Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (MAFF) are the two Government Departments mainly responsible for official policies relating to human nutrition in England and Wales. Within the latter Department is the Food Standards, Science and Safety Division which contains four scientific branches, each of which is concerned with some special aspect of food. These aspects are wide, and include: nutrition and diet, food standards, food additives and contaminants, storage of food for emergency purposes, and the effects of atomic radiation on food and agricultural products.

Departments such as MAFF must be able speedily to supply definitive information on a very wide variety of topics. Questions addressed to the Minister, the briefing of officials, and the servicing of committees, often require rapid action. Departments acquire large amounts of information (in many forms), and a good knowledge of departmental organization is essential for its efficient utilization. Scientific and technical matter must be interpreted and presented in a form which is meaningful to those with administrative and executive responsibility.

Our broad responsibilities make it necessary to be alert to new developments in food production and processing, and to any public reaction to these. If it is found that there is insufficient knowledge of the nutritional implications of such new developments, appropriate practical investigations may be initiated.

Assessment of average food consumption is made by means of the National Food Survey; other Departmental publications include the *Manual of Nutrition* and several booklets dealing with the cooking and preservation of food. The Ministry of Health are concerned with the publication of reports of certain expert panels on specialized aspects of nutrition.

To keep abreast of developments, it is necessary to scrutinize a wide range of scientific and technical literature, and to have personal liaison with representatives of governmental, academic and industrial institutions with interests in food and related subjects. Indexes giving details of specialists and their location are being prepared. Unpublished information is often difficult to locate, but improvement in liaison should ease this problem.

A selection of items from literature received is made by the Food and Nutrition Library; a more specialized selection is made by the Information Section in the Food Standards, Science and Safety Division, which issues a small 'current awareness' sheet, mainly for distribution within the Department.

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