

## ROYAL COMMISSION ON MEDICAL EDUCATION

The Society was invited to submit evidence to the Commission. The text of the document submitted in July 1966 is printed below.

### *The Nutrition Society*

The Nutrition Society wishes to submit evidence concerning the need to include the teaching of nutrition in the education of medical undergraduates and post-graduates in Great Britain.

There have been great advances in nutritional knowledge in recent years. The importance of nutritional factors in the pathogenesis and therapy of disease and the importance of nutrition in conditions of physiological stress, e.g. in growth, pregnancy and lactation, are of primary interest to the medical profession. 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). In this respect, the situation is not dissimilar to that existing in the United States where, according to American Medical Association's Council in Foods and Nutrition (*J. Am. med. Ass.* 1963, **183**, 955), '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'.

It is not envisaged that nutritional teaching should be necessarily a separate and distinct part of the medical course, but it should be introduced in its correct context throughout the course. In making the following suggestions we are well aware that they are already in operation in a number of Medical Schools:

#### 1. *The preclinical course*

The physiological and biochemical basis of nutrition should be taught in the pre-clinical years, either as part of biochemistry or of physiology. We recommend that in every Medical School the responsibility for teaching the fundamentals of human nutrition should be clearly placed on one or other of these departments. Every Medical School should see that at least one member of the preclinical staff is well informed on the subject.

#### 2. *Clinical teaching*

The pathology and therapy of nutritionally-induced and nutritionally-dependent disease should be taught in clinical years. All students should receive instructions in the dietetic out-patient department in the dietary management of disease, particularly of obesity and diabetes, and in the use of special hospital diets.

#### 3. *Preventive medicine*

*Maternity and Child Health Services.* All students should be given instruction in the important role of these services in preventing nutritional disorders in this country. Deficiency diseases are rare only because of continuous education of mothers.

*Malnutrition in certain social groups.* Students should be advised of the possibility of malnutrition in certain social groups, e.g. in elderly people who live alone and who may be undernourished for social rather than economic reasons.

#### 4. *Postgraduate courses*

It is important that the medical practitioner be kept informed of advance in nutritional knowledge by suitable postgraduate courses.

*Nutrition in developing countries.* There should be an opportunity for students to study in some detail this subject, which is one of the most important issues facing the world today. Students from developing countries and others who plan to work abroad should be encouraged to attend such a course.

#### 5. *Overall plan*

There should be an overall plan to ensure the dissemination of nutritional knowledge throughout the course in a co-ordinated manner. In this way unnecessary replication may be avoided whilst important interrelationships can be emphasized. Wherever possible a Medical School should place authority in an individual or committee with the responsibility to propose an integrated teaching programme in nutrition which would cover the efforts of various departments.

We recommend, therefore:

- (1) that the physiological and biochemical basis of nutrition is taught in pre-clinical years;
- (2) that the pathology and therapy of nutritionally-induced disease is taught in clinical years;
- (3) that the public health aspects of nutrition are dealt with in the medical curriculum;
- (4) that basic dietetics are presented to the medical student in such a manner that he can make full use of his 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. on medical practice in developing or tropical countries;
- (6) that a Medical School should place authority in an individual or committee with responsibility to propose an integrated and full teaching programme in nutrition, which would cover the efforts of various departments.