Obituary

Louise Sarah Davies
BSc, PhD, FIHec MRSM – Gerontologist

We are sad to announce the death of Dr Louise Davies on the 9th November 2019 at the age of 96.

Louise was a pioneer in the research of nutrition of the elderly – founding the Geriatric Nutrition Unit (GNU) at Queen Elizabeth College – London University in 1968, housed in the Nutrition Department. In 1984, renamed the Gerontology Nutrition Unit, it transferred to the Royal Free Hospital School of Medicine, London where she was an Honorary Senior Lecturer. She was an Adviser to EURONUT-SENECA (Nutrition of the elderly in Europe) and Deputy Chair of the International Union of Nutritional Sciences (IUNS) Committee on Nutrition and Ageing, chaired by Professor Mark L Wahlqvist.

Louise was a powerful advocate of nutrition being the food people ate and that nutrition needed to be a practical science. Research into Action was her mantra.

One of her great strengths was her ability to communicate. At Brighton and Hove High School her favourite subject was English. In 1941 she won an Exhibition to study dietetics at Kings College of Household and Social Science, London University. On graduation in 1944, Louise joined the Public Relations Division of the Ministry of Food, editing a fortnightly magazine “Food and Nutrition” for dietitians and social science teachers. This reached pupils and their parents, so developing a life-long communication of Nutritional Science to everyone.

She had a long association with BBC Radio (British Broadcasting Corporation). In 1952, with the support of her husband Leonard Golding, she entered a new career in the radio programme Woman’s Hour with “Market Intelligence” and later established the morning slot “Shopping List”, a consumer programme that ran for 12 years giving news on seasonal produce, price movements and recipe ideas.

Widowed in her mid-forties with two young daughters, a chance overheard remark, forecast a rapid increase in the elderly population, and led to Louise to establish an independent Geriatric Nutrition Research Unit under the guidance of a long term advisor and friend, Professor John Yudkin in his pioneering Nutrition Department at Queen Elizabeth College, London. The Unit’s aim was to conduct basic research into the nutrition needs and preferences of the elderly and then to bridge the gap between nutrition research and its practical applications for people and those caring for them. The initial investigations had the guidance of Professor Norman Exton-Smith.

With enormous enthusiasm, and a small dedicated team, the GNU helped to introduce cookery classes for elderly men and women (“nutrition equals food that is eaten”); conducted longitudinal surveys on nutrition and health before and after retirement; promoted Meals on Wheels in the UK and across the globe; developed Catering in Residential Homes; formulated Assessment of Nutritional Risk for health; and established Warning Signals for Malnutrition applicable to people internationally. The initial findings formed the basis of her PhD in 1976 and were published in a range of general scientific and special interest journals, most archived at King’s College together with original files, lecture slides and practical Assessment Kits. Additional papers and an oral history interview the year before her death are in the British Nutrition Foundation Archive. She was twice a Temporary Adviser to the World Health Organisation; liaised with food manufacturers and retailers and lectured in the UK and internationally to academics, medical students, extensively with dietitians, nurses and retirement groups, and to men and women in old people’s clubs.

She was asked to write a cookery book for the elderly. But she had shown that the need was for recipes for individuals or couples at a stage when they no longer catered for families or partners. Her 1971 Penguin cookery book “Easy Cooking For One or Two” was bought not just by the elderly but by students and newly -weds. It sold over a million copies. The book ranked 4 on the Penguin sales for that year. Together with being the first woman awarded a prestigious international award for contributions to nutrition, nominated for it by Dr Elsie Widdowson from Cambridge University, these were two of her proudest achievements.

In 1988 Louise retired from research and returned to her first love of summing up lengthy publications and learned reports of international surveys, in order to translate research findings into practical action. In this way, she worked with the IUNS Committee on Nutrition and Ageing, and SENECA and acted as an adviser to HALE (the Healthy Ageing: Longitudinal Study in Europe). She kept in touch with many admiring, colleagues across the globe, including Australia, Canada, Sweden and Greece, interested in their work to the end.

Louise Davies (Golding) lived an inspiring life from 15th April 1923 to 9th November 2019. She is survived by her two daughters and three grandchildren.

Citation by
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