

## NUTRITIONAL ATTITUDES AND KNOWLEDGE OF NURSES

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Responsibility for monitoring of the food intake of patients in hospitals is often ill-defined. Neglect of this aspect of patient care contributes to the occurrence of 'hospital malnutrition' (Butterworth 1976). We decided to ascertain the views of nurses in South Australia in regard to their role as reporters of food intake. We also sought their views on other nutrition-related aspects of patient care and we tested their knowledge of foods and nutritional science.

A total of 698 nurses completed a questionnaire which was distributed to 13 hospitals throughout the State. The knowledge section of the questionnaire was also completed by 39 trainee and practising dietitians.

Sixty-nine per cent of the respondents indicated that nursing staff should be responsible for checking on how much patients eat at each meal. Fifty-seven percent agreed that attending doctors make use of nurses' observations on patients' food intake and 35 per cent agreed that doctors generally do not take sufficient interest in the nutrition of patients. With regard to training in nutrition 49 percent indicated that nutrition as taught in schools of nursing is an interesting topic. However, 81 per cent agreed that more emphasis should be placed on integrating nutrition into the nursing curriculum and 91 per cent indicated that continuing nutrition education is necessary for all nurses. Seventy per cent thought that their functioning as a nurse could be improved if they had a greater knowledge of nutrition.

The mean score of all the nurses was 63 per cent and that of the dietitians was 81. The main discrepancy between the two groups was in their knowledge of foods. Many nurses appeared to have misconceptions about the nutritional values of, for example, raw sugar, canned fruits, yoghurt and honey. No significant correlation was found between nutrition knowledge and attitude.

'Hospital malnutrition' could be a useful focus for both basic and in-service training of nurses in nutrition. This training should be complemented by more nutrition in the medical curriculum.

BUTTERWORTH, C.E. and BLACKBURN, G.L. (1975). *Nutrition Today*. 10 : 8.

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