

HUMAN NUTRITION RESEARCH AT DEAKIN AND DIETETICS

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A profession needs a milieu of active research for several reasons :

- a) to test, challenge and enlarge the data base on which it operates;
- b) to evaluate the quality and effectiveness of practice;
- c) to evaluate and explore educational methodologies.

The University in no way seeks, nor should it, to dominate the research interests of the practising profession, but it can serve as a stimulus to research and as a resource in planning research.

It may be of interest to indicate the kinds of research presently active in the Department of Human Nutrition at Deakin University and these can be considered under several themes :

1. Nutrition and the Community

Several of our community nutrition studies are based in the Geelong or Barwon Region of Victoria and can be grouped as "The Geelong Studies" - breastfeeding, growth, industrial health and nutrition, diabetes education, physical activity, the aged.

A growing range of studies is also linking the University to South East Asia and these can be grouped as the "South East Asian Studies" - these are taking place in connection with colleagues in Indonesia, Malaysia, the Phillipines and Thailand.

2. Dietetic Training and Practice

The University is particularly interested to improve training and practice through research and would welcome liaison with the profession in these areas.

3. Food Analysis

Well under way are several areas of food analytical work including dietary fibre, folacin, vitamin A, sugars and toxins.

4. Nutritional Physiology

Two key areas of nutritional physiology are being actively explored, namely that of dietary fibre and that of exercise.

5. Clinical Nutrition

Since its inception, the University Department of Human Nutrition has had a policy that its clinically trained members should be active in the practising profession and, inevitably, there has been related research interest which includes the problem areas of obesity, diabetes, lipid disorders and the particular feeding problems of the handicapped.

The beneficial consequences of research for the practising dietitian profession can be several :

- a) Credibility - the dietetic profession is distinguished from other groups who claim nutritional expertise in that it endeavours

not to deliver rote information, but strives to be contemporaneous and responsive to changing ideas.

- b) Intellectual and professional excitement and satisfaction - the hallmark of professionals is their readiness, often excitement, and certainly satisfaction that comes from identifying and implementing new ideas.
- c) New job opportunities :
- research itself;
 - multi disciplinary activities through the acquisition of methodologies outside of dietetics (examples would be laboratory work, computer science, epidemiology and behavioural science);
 - raising employer interests (a good recent example would be the new interest shown in dietitians by industry, both food and general).

The University's relationship with the profession is in the narrow sense of training, through the final year student in dietetics. But the University actually contributes at large to the profession's welfare, not only through research, but as an information resource, in ongoing education, in enlarging the communities awareness in dietetics, and in lobbying for improved conditions for the profession. It does so at a time of severe economic restraint.

No-meat diets: do they lower the cancer risk in women?

Neither low intake of fat nor avoidance of meat in adult life has any pronounced effect on mortality from breast or colorectal cancer in women, reports the author of this retrospective study from England. However, these results in nuns who presumably altered their diet in adult life do not rule out a protective effect of low-fat and low-meat diets begun before adulthood. The author suggests that nutrition before maturity may prove more important with respect to cancer prevention than adult dietary patterns.

Cancer death rates are compared with expected mortality among two strict religious orders

of women: one proscribed meat consumption and the other limited it. Mortality from breast, ovarian, and colorectal cancer did not differ from the expected mortality in either group.

However, both groups had excess mortality from oesophageal cancer, an unexpected finding, since these subjects were not exposed to known risk factors for this disease, such as alcohol or tobacco. Both groups ate large amounts of unrefined dry bread, but there was no evidence of any specific dietary deficiencies in subjects in either group.

L. J. KINLEN, University of Oxford, Radcliffe Infirmary, Oxford, England. Meat and fat consumption and cancer mortality: a study of strict religious orders in Britain. *Lancet* 1:946-949, 1982.