

An applied approach to incorporating nutrition into clinical teaching in the undergraduate medical course at UNSW

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Despite recommendations for the inclusion of food science and nutrition in undergraduate medical curricula in Australia (1,2), there has been little progress in meeting these recommendations. While the introduction of postgraduate, problem-based medical curricula offer opportunities for increasing nutrition content, it is difficult to assure it a place in more traditional undergraduate courses, particularly where it has been stipulated that no new content be introduced into the curriculum.

Priority topics for inclusion in the course at UNSW were identified (3); and an investigation as to which of these were currently included revealed that while many of the basic nutrition topics were covered to some extent in preclinical years, the more applied clinical and preventive aspects were largely dependent on which clinical attachments were experienced by individual students.

A practical guide on nutritional assessment and management of some common nutrition-related problems has been prepared to improve nutrition content during clinical years at UNSW. The 'Food Package' consists of a book of guidelines, and a loose leaf folder. The guidelines cover patient history, physical examination, laboratory investigation and dietary assessment and management of cardiovascular disease, obesity, diabetes mellitus, and in particular nutrition problems of children and the elderly. Each of the guidelines follows the format of key questions linked to specific doctor's or patient's goals and reference to useful information or suitable handouts. Examples of good resources, assembled from a variety of sources, and lists of resources and where to get them, are provided in the loose leaf folder.

Although the 'Food Package' was endorsed at a meeting of the Curriculum Committee of Faculty, past experience suggested that careful consideration needed to be given to devising ways to ensure that the 'Package' was incorporated into clinical teaching. A workshop was organised to discuss the goals, objectives and appropriate methods of using the 'Package', and to identify key interested members of Faculty. Our experience with using this approach for incorporating nutrition into clinical teaching will be discussed.

1. Better Health Commission. Looking forward to better health (Vol 2). Canberra: AGPS, 1986.
2. Boulton TJC, Wahlqvist M. Nutrition in medical education. *Med J Aust* 1989;151(Suppl): 1-22.
3. Craig PL, Judd HL, Warden RA. Nutrition teaching in the undergraduate medical curriculum: a survey of priorities at UNSW. *Aust J Nutr Diet* 1993;50:19-24.