

EDITORIAL

Proceedings of the Nutrition Society 1942–1997

In July 1941 an invitation was sent out to people interested in nutrition research suggesting that a Nutrition Society should be formed on the lines of the Physiological and Biochemical Societies. The meetings would enable ‘workers studying different aspects of the same problem in agricultural and medical institutions to meet and help each other with information and constructive criticism’. The response was apparently great enough for the opening speaker, the pioneer nutrition researcher Sir Frederick Hopkins, at the inaugural meeting of the ‘English Group’ held in October 1941 to remark on the large attendance. So large, indeed, that the meeting had to be held in the Physiological Laboratory, Cambridge, rather than the Dunn Nutritional Laboratory, a point made rather regretfully by the reader of the first scientific communication, Dr L. J. Harris of the Dunn. His paper on the evaluation of nutritional status attempted to convince his audience of the value of biochemical and physiological assessment of subclinical deficiencies. Considering that Sir Frederick Hopkins had recalled scorn being poured on the ‘fanciful idea’ of the very existence of vitamins by ‘three stalwart Scotsmen’ (who?!), one can appreciate how far these early members had come. Not to be outdone, and for the ‘convenience of members during the war’, the Scottish Group held their inaugural business meeting in January 1942 at which they elected a committee (representing the four main centres in Scotland) to deal with arrangements for membership and scientific meetings in Scotland.

The names of the people and institutions involved in the early days of the Nutrition Society read like a ‘Who’s who’ of nutrition research and include Dr H. Chick (Lister Institute), Professor J. C. Drummond (Biochemistry, University College, London), Sir E. Mellanby (Medical Research Council) and Sir J. B. Orr (Rowett Research Institute) who was elected Chairman at the first AGM. In their first year they ran nine (!) scientific meetings with the objective of providing a ‘common meeting place for workers in the various fields of nutrition, e.g. physiological, biochemical, agricultural, medical, sociological, economic and public health’. Some of these meetings were of direct relevance to the times, for example ‘problems of collective feeding in war time’, and included among the speakers Dr M. Pyke (on food supplies). Three meetings were devoted to food supplies in relation to human needs, and speakers included Dr V. P. Sydenstricker (on symptoms and signs of deficiency of the B group of vitamins), Dr J. Yudkin (on vitamin deficiencies and the pathogenesis of disease), and Dr E. M. Widdowson and Dr R. A. McCance presented a paper on ‘the absorption and excretion of trace elements’. The first volume of the *Proceedings of the Nutrition Society* was published in 1942, once it was realized that a wider audience than those able to attend the meetings would appreciate reading them.

Since 1942, members of the Nutrition Society have formed a series of Scientific Interest Groups which organize symposia on subjects in their own field – animal nutrition and metabolism, clinical nutrition and metabolism, international and public health nutrition, macronutrient metabolism, micronutrients, nutrition and behaviour, and reproduction, growth and development. The fruits of these symposia form the groups of reviews that are published in the *Proceedings*, together with the symposium papers

generated from the Irish and Scottish Section meetings, and the Summer Meeting. A recent development in the running of these meetings is the arrangement of several joint meetings with sister societies, for example the Association for the Study of Obesity, the Biochemical Society, the British Society of Animal Science and l'Association Française de Nutrition.

The quality of the papers published in the *Proceedings* has contributed to its high Impact Factor (1.858 in 1995), ranking the journal 7th among nutrition and dietetics journals worldwide according to the SCI Journal Citation Report. A related contributing factor towards the success of the *Proceedings* must be the highly interesting and topical subject matter of the symposia which are put forward by the Groups and Sections and (usually) agreed by the Programmes Committee (on which are representatives of all the Groups and Sections, ably led for the last few years by Dr Fred Andrews). Thus the Programmes Committee effectively forms the editorial board for the *Proceedings*, and the Proceedings Editor then has the task of overseeing and encouraging the gestation and birth of the symposium papers and abstracts of original communications – usually within 1 year of presentation at a scientific meeting.

So what has this volume of the *Proceedings* in store? You may have noticed that the cover now includes a list of symposium titles inviting those who did not attend the 1996 Summer Meeting (held at the University of Ulster at Coleraine) to bring themselves up to date on the subject of 'Nutrition and poverty in industrial countries', 'Mechanisms of energy compensation', 'Meeting the needs of lactation' or 'The weaning process'. In Volume 56 (1B) will be published the other Coleraine symposia, including 'Nutritional issues for women', 'Diabetes towards the year 2000' and 'Assessment of nutritional status in disease and other trauma'. Also, for the first time there are five excellent short review papers presented by postgraduate students (the first such symposium to be held by the Nutrition Society) and Dr Joe McPartlin's powerful and moving Plenary Invited Lecture on The Great Famine.

Volume 56 (2) will contain an exciting series of papers on postprandial lipid metabolism given at a joint meeting between the Macronutrient Metabolism Group of the Nutrition Society, the Lipid Group of the Biochemical Society and the Royal Society of Medicine, London. This is a fascinating (though rather acronym-laden) field, and I learned a lot from reading these reviews. One emerging aspect of great interest to many will be the link between postprandial lipids and coronary heart disease. Also to come is a symposium (jointly held between the Animal Nutrition and Metabolism Group and the British Society of Animal Science) on 'Regulation of nitrogen retention in farm animals', which brings one from molecular mechanisms in growth regulation up to whole-animal modelling of nitrogen flow. This year, for the first time, we are publishing the symposium run by the Clinical Nutrition and Metabolism Group of the Nutrition Society at the British Association for Parenteral and Enteral Nutrition conference. The subject is of increasing clinical significance – 'New perspectives on the anorexia/cachexia syndrome'.

The Winter Meeting this year links the concerns of the food industry with those of public health nutritionists; aspects to be covered include new food processing technologies and functional foods. However, I cannot comment further on these papers (or on others to be presented on 'Nutritional aspects of bone' in April, or 'Nutrition in wild and captive animals' in May) since I have not seen them yet – I suspect many of them are not yet written – and I must live in hope that they reach me in time for publication in November 1997! The *Proceedings* lives somewhat on a knife-edge since we aspire to prompt publication of this topical material, which I know to be particularly important to authors of abstracts of original communications, and also (I imagine) to the readers of the reviews, whether or not the subject is in their field.

Future developments to be seen in the *Proceedings* will include the formal publication of each volume in four parts (rather than three, with No. 1 being divided into parts A and B), and perhaps a change in format. Discussion on how best to handle abstracts of original communications continues and the question of submission on disc is being considered also. There are certain to be changes in the air as we go forward with our new publishers, CAB INTERNATIONAL, but not such as to compromise the quality of the material published. This is attributable largely to the speakers invited by the Society and, ultimately, to the members who contribute to the committees organizing the scientific meetings. As long as the membership of the Nutrition Society is interested in meetings at which nutritional questions are addressed, the *Proceedings of the Nutrition Society* will continue to reflect that interest.

Kate Younger
Proceedings Editor