

There is no possibility of carrying out the difficult work with any simplified ready reckoner about diet. We have had to part with the 19th century outlook which was wrong and inadequate very largely because it attempted too great a simplification. The objections were obvious; yet people chose to overlook them, and went on for years with a simplification which would not explain the facts. It was at variance with the fairly competent knowledge of the ordinary housewife. It would be a good thing if every dietician had to read the literature of the past. There is a book by one, Sir Henry Thompson (1885), which ran into four editions 60 years ago, in which he condemns the purchase of green vegetables by the poor as a wasteful luxury, that, at a time when it was already realized in this country that scurvy in infants really was scurvy and could be cured by appropriate diet. That was the result of over simplification.

At present there is an attempt at simplification by classifying foods as "body builders", "protective foods" and "workers and warmers". Take the body builders; the protein of yeast, by itself, is not a good protein for maintaining growth because it contains little methionine; the protein of white flour is defective because it contains little lysine; a mixture of the two is excellent for maintaining growth. Which is the "body builder"? It is rather like the question about Seidlitz powders: is it the blue packet or the white packet that makes the fizz? To play the part of practical adviser it is essential to keep pace with the whole of the science of nutrition with all its problems and uncertainties; there are no short cuts.

I do not know whether, in the course of training, one can say that it is possible to teach perspective, but it is a most essential thing that a dietician actually practising should know when it is necessary to compromise, or advisable to compromise, in the interests of cooking facilities and expense, and when it is necessary for the dietician to dig in her toes.

The future will bring a steadily growing demand for dieticians to hold posts which demand both knowledge and discretion.

#### REFERENCE

- Thompson, H. (1885). *Food and Feeding*. London and New York: Frederick Warne and Co.

## The Training of Dieticians: The Current Position

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There are probably many conflicting definitions of the word dietician in the minds of members of this audience and, therefore, any who venture to express an opinion about the training for this occupation should indicate what they mean by the word. We must all agree that the dietician's work is concerned with the feeding of human beings, just as we presumably agree that a nurse's work is concerned with the care of the sick and the helpless. What we perhaps do not all agree about is the necessity for some standard or basic kind of training for the occupation of dietician, in much the same way as a basic training is necessary for a nurse or doctor or teacher.

It is widely recognized that the duties of dieticians are most varied, but

in all the likely fields of their activities a sound knowledge of the essential principles of nutrition is required. Only a person who is deemed to possess such knowledge should, I submit, be called a dietician, but it is clear that if the term dietician is to be limited to those possessing a certain standard of knowledge of nutritional principles, some authority ought to be entrusted with the duty of approving both the scheme of training and the method of assessing the final result of such training. At present the only corporate body interested in approving schemes of such training in this country is the British Dietetic Association; they have staked out a claim to their definition of the word dietician, to which I am at present prepared to assent. When, therefore, I speak this morning of the training of dieticians, I mean the training of persons who, after training, would be accepted as dieticians by the British Dietetic Association.

As I see it, dieticians are entrusted with the duty of seeing that human beings are fed in accordance with those accepted nutritional principles which promise the most favourable influence on health and well-being. They must, therefore, be familiar with the ground work of the science of nutrition and have sufficient knowledge of, and interest in, the subject to keep pace with its advances.

The amount and kind of training necessary to give a person the required knowledge is bound to be the subject of disagreement at the present early stage of the existence of this occupation or profession. A person might be employed in some of the work regularly undertaken by some dieticians even if her scientific training was limited to the use of a balance, while the work of many dieticians could not be accomplished without a detailed, comprehensive and up-to-date knowledge of the principles of nutrition. These variations were brought home to me forcibly during a visit to San Francisco before this war. I found that dieticians training at one large hospital had all received, not only a degree in domestic science, but an M.Sc. degree in nutrition as well, awarded after 2 years of postgraduate study, before beginning their vocational training. Those employed at the rival hospital were taken on with no special previous training, and were expected to do nothing which required any personal initiative; their function was to weigh out, cook and serve such food as someone else had prescribed. Needless to say these women were not recognized as dieticians by the American Dietetic Association.

Dieticians must not only be familiar with the science of nutrition, they must be able also to translate the theoretical food requirements of human beings into amounts of available foods and to construct menus accordingly, whether they are dealing with healthy or sick persons.

They must know also how to procure, store, prepare, cook and serve food so that its nutritive value and its aesthetic appeal are maintained at their highest possible level. Some dieticians may have to give advice regarding the actual production of food from the soil.

If such functions as these are conceded to the dietician, it is clear that the training required is both theoretical and vocational in character. The theoretical training must obviously include as one of its main features the science of nutrition and the proper understanding of the principles of nutrition, and must be based on a sound knowledge of the elements of chemistry, physics, and physiology. The exact nature of the vocational training is the subject of a certain amount of disagreement at the present

time. When trained dieticians were first employed in this country there was almost only one kind of post open to them, namely the running of special diet kitchens in hospitals. Women who wished to take up this kind of work held some degree in science and went to America to obtain their special vocational training. At the present time trained dieticians are employed in a great variety of duties to supervise the feeding of people in all kinds of institutions, boarding and day schools, hotels, hospitals and canteens; some of them are employed by public authorities to give advice on any questions regarding nutrition which may arise in the district.

The routine duties of dieticians may be extremely varied, but their due execution depends in most instances on a familiarity with a number of practical procedures connected with the provision and serving of food. The trained dietician is not just a cook, but she should know a lot about cooking; she is not a housekeeper, though the welfare of enormous households may depend to no small extent on her advice and supervision; she is not a steward, though she must be well informed in all that pertains to the buying of food and kitchen equipment.

The work of many dieticians is still concerned with feeding in hospitals, the feeding of both patients and staff. It is also by no means rare for dieticians engaged primarily in supervising the feeding of healthy persons to have to advise from time to time about the feeding of the sick. There is, therefore, a good deal to be said for retaining a period of training in hospital as part of the vocational training of all dieticians. There is, however, no excuse for regarding the period of training in hospital as the only practical training necessary.

I do not propose to discuss the details of the training required for turning out competent dieticians. I would merely stress the personal opinion that these valuable people should be regarded as the most responsible of a series of persons who are concerned with the feeding of groups of human beings; they should, therefore, be selected with some care, and receive a training commensurate with the knowledge and responsibility required of them. Cooks, caterers, kitchen supervisors and stewards, may all have to do some of the work which dieticians do, and they may all benefit from a knowledge of nutritional principles. The good dietician, I submit, should be competent to supervise the work of all such persons and to guide them in the paths of sound nutritional practice, if such exists; her training should be correspondingly wide.

It may be objected that elaborate training is not always necessary, and that the right persons may without special training fulfil admirably the duties of the qualified dietician. Such objections are not really valid. It might similarly be agreed that special training is not necessary for the medical man or the dentist or the nurse. I met only the other day a young man who had never been near a medical school and had for seven years been running single handed a hospital for 500 patients. The fact that such a thing can be done will not, I imagine, influence the powers that be to dispense with medical training.

As I see it, the need for trained dieticians will continue to increase and, though the exact form of training may change from time to time, it will always be of a type which demands a high level of intelligence and an exacting course of study.