

Nutrition Session

Korea – Speaker

Information society and dietary culture : What is the problem and what should be done?

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Today, no one can disagree with me in saying that it is a very difficult task to deal with dietary culture as a whole in an era of widely available informations. Dietary culture can be anything and everything that we could think of in terms of diet and health. There must be a reason for the theme of information society and dietary culture to have been selected for this meeting. In many cases, the term, 'information' connotes 'future' nowadays. My understanding of the theme given to me today, thus, is to think of our diet (or eating) in terms of nutrition and health related information. It is quite challenging to address this issue. Concerning this matter, the situation of Korea is unlikely to be very different from that of other economically better off countries. I will address the following issues: the reason we should devote extra attention to 'nutrition and health related information' in the future and the role that the professionals like ourselves should assume in this context.

Nutritional science is no older than the century. Humans have eaten and survived for millennia before there was a science of nutrition or anyone to apply it. It is worth asking how people learn what to eat. The answer is, of course, through the cultural transmission of eating habits.

Our diets have changed dramatically through the course of history. There were three major cultural revolutions that radically altered our eating habits; those were agricultural, industrial and scientific revolutions.

About 12,000 years ago, a dramatic change in the way humans obtained their food unfolded as they gradually shifted from food collection to food production. People switched from eating a wide variety of foraged foods to a small number of domesticated plants and animals. The scientific revolution begun in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries brought another major cultural revolution in human diets. Because of the scientific revolution, we are able to have our current level of knowledge on nutrition, and to exert an unprecedented control over our food supply and health. Industrial revolution unfolded in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries

was also one of the major changes. Technical advancements in transportation, refrigeration, and food processing gradually modified human diets primarily by making food cheaper, expanding the variety of foods available, and keeping them fresher longer.

The industrial and scientific revolutions have exerted immense influences on the human diet. In recent decades, traditional eating patterns have rapidly modified. Simply because recently emerging eating patterns are different from the traditional ones, they cannot be considered as being totally problematic. The fact that traditional food patterns were compatible with survival through the reproductive years is not enough to support that they were optimal. Nevertheless, the industrial and scientific revolutions appear to have created dilemma that we must resolve.

The abundance and convenience of food supply in parts of the world have led some people to have unbalanced diet, perhaps dangerously high intakes of refined carbohydrates, cholesterol and saturated fats. Currently, the leading causes of mortality and morbidity in Korea are chronic diseases (i. e. heart and liver disease and cancer). Many interrelated factors are responsible for the development of chronic diseases; yet no one can deny the importance of one's eating habits.

One of the problems that we have confronted is that the advancement of science and technology has made it possible to manipulate food's sensory properties. The tastiness and appearance of foods no longer inform us of their nutritional worth. We have fully segregated palatability from nutrition. Unlike other animals, humans are no longer assured of getting what we need by simply eating what we want. We, humans, are being exposed to attractive food products that are neither biologically nor culturally familiar. Under these circumstances, one clear fact is that we must select the food we eat. Also, we must have criteria of selection with understanding, skills, and motivation necessary for nutritionally desirable food choices.

The task of nutritionists has been primarily asking people to limit or add certain elements to their diet. They basically ask ones to switch from intrinsically tasty foods to ones that may seem less tasty, convenient and higher cost sometimes. Many studies suggest that changing people's eating habits in a way deemed nutritionally desirable is not a easy task.

Why is dietary change so difficult? The answer of this question is partly to be many sources of nutrition and health information. Another reason is that dietary change involves non-nutritional factors (e.g. communication, education, psychology).

When we say we are living in an information society, it implies that we can get enormous amounts of information with less effort. In the future

acquiring nutrition and health related information will not be a limiting factor in improving or maintaining health. Nutrition and health messages or influences come from many different sources such as cultural, social and family influences, the government, food industry, and personal experiences etc. The scientific literature reports only a fraction of the activity in the fields of nutrition and health. Other publications (popular magazines, newsletters from various advocacy organizations) that carry news of nutrition and health provide other, largely anecdotal, information. All of these forces are at work when individuals make food choices, but messages are often in conflict. At issue here is how to discriminate useful information from the useless. People need help to make a right food choice, particularly in the era when the tons of conflicting information are available.

What should the role of professionals be in this context? By Tylor, the content of any field derives from the needs of the profession, the needs of the learner and the needs of society. When we reappraise the field of food and nutrition in terms of Tylor's dictum, we find that the needs of the learner and the profession have not been fully congruent each other. Conventionally, the profession of food and nutrition has approached 'diet' on a basis of 'nutrients.' The field of food and nutrition structures as a kind of pyramid in which relevant knowledge is produced at the top by the scientists. People eat foods not nutrients. If learners need to know what foods to eat, nutrient based approach is insufficient in terms of helping people to make a right food choice.

Achieving this set of goals inevitably involves information and activities that will affect people's behavior. There are many influences on behavior and numerous conflicts of interest, motivations and needs. Therefore, it is not surprising to mention that there is an increased need for a behavioral approach to nutrition and health studies. We, the professionals, should increase our understanding of the determinants of nutrition-related behaviors and the theories of behavioral change. At the same time, we should help consumers to acquire the analytical skills to evaluate the great amount of nutrition information that is now provided to them through the media. Understanding research on ways of knowing, learning styles and problem solving skills should be enhanced.

In the field of food and nutrition, importance of an integrated approach to the studies on diet and health is well recognized. But in reality, considerable proportion of research on this issue do not appear to be well designed considering this matter. Many professionals in the area of nutrition and health are trained by the biomedical tradition. Their studies were guided by static main-effect model, that has its root in the biomedical

model of disease. In its simplest form, the biomedical model is a reductionist approach in which agent and disease are conceptualized as causality and lineally related. The main effect model does not account for the social and cultural phenomena in which a particular nutrition or health problem occurs.

There is much to be done in the fields of diet and health. Many subjects on how and what to eat (e. g. nutrition supplements, health foods, food safety, etc.) are controversial. Highly sophisticated research on the relationship between diet, genes and disease suggest that a time may come when a healthful diet can be tailored to the individual, but it may not be in the near future. Only a small proportion of all diseases are directly caused by a person's genes. Helping people to develop a personal and rational food policy that takes into consideration the needs of themselves (the learner), the profession, and the society will continue to benefit the health of general population. This has been and will be our (food and nutrition specialists possessing the roots of home economics) job. The greater challenge for future will be in finding ways of putting into practice what is already known about healthful eating.

Nutrition education can be an effective way of achieving dietary changes. It deals with informations and activities affecting behavior. Nutrition education has begun to draw a number of theories from the fields of social psychology and communication, although it still requires further development in elaborating theoretical frameworks in which to achieve nutritionally desirable dietary habits.

In the information society, the accessibility to knowledge on a better diet may not be the most limiting factor in maintaining or improving the health of an individual. Information on how to eat properly is no more solely provided by reliable nutrition or health professionals. Unfortunately there is no legal system which protects consumers perfectly from the misinformation. At the same time we must choose among biologically and culturally unfamiliar foods. At issue here is how to choose the right ones. There is a role for home economists, particularly for those with food and nutrition background.

In this context, the needs of the consumer (the learner designated by Tylor), the profession and the society should be seriously considered. In particular, we, the professionals, should act on behalf of the consumer and learn the effective means of communicating with them. This task will not be accomplished by conventional approaches in the field (i. e. a nutrient based approach). It does not necessarily means that nutrition sciences are inappropriate; it simply means that the conventional approaches are insufficient. More integrated, holistic approaches to food and nutrition are necessary. There is much left to accomplish.

Nutrition Session

Korea – Reactor Paper by Oh, Se-Young.

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Currently many people said that we are living in an information society. Nobody hesitate to call this is another cultural revolution next to agricultural, industrial and scientific revolution. In the various field of society, everybody are concerned about what is the impact of new era on their area. It is appropriate or may be late to discuss about information society and dietary culture in our field.

Speaker for this topic, deliberate why we should devote extra attentions to "nutrition and health related information in the future and what is the role of professionals like ourselves.

One of problems that she pointed out is the segregation of palatability from nutrition because of advancements of sciences and technology. Most of living beings are assured of getting what they need by eating what they want. Under current situation, the taste and appearance of foods are no longer valid criteria for nutritional well beings. We must select the foods from many attractive foods that may not appropriate for biological needs or cultural traditions. Since we must have criteria for selections with understanding, skills, and motivation necessary for nutritionally desirable food choices and we can have enormous amounts of information with easy, there should be effective nutrition educations. For effective nutrition educations, there should be more integrated approach, because dietary behaviors are learned behaviors which are influenced by social, cultural, economical, and biological factors.

I have same opinions with the speaker about the needs of extra attention to nutrition and health related informations and the professional roles.

However, I would like to add some more aspects. First, in Korea, may be in some countries has same situation, nutritional problems solved by the economic development not by the nutrition education.

Until 1970s, many Koreans suffered from under nutrition. But Korea has been able to solve this problem through rapid economic development. With this change, the food consumption pattern has been changed. Also, with the improving environmental sanitation and

nutrition, people become live longer. As a result, chronic degenerative disease have been rapidly increased during past years.

Recently, there is growing interest among the public about health. Nutritional issues are one of the health issue which have received substantial attention. Public want more informations. Usually many messages for the public are oversimplified. People want simple answers whether certain foods is good or not. Usually mass communication is chosen as the information sources by the public. Media publicity about specific foods can produce public interest about specific foods. They may originate from scientist who are seeking publicity or marketeers who wish to sell their products or media.

In other words in Korea nutritional problems are solved by socio-economic factors not by scientific informations. Now to meet public expectation, there are too many oversimplified informations which may not change but may disturb usual dietary behaviors. Yet until now, in Korea, nutrition informations probably are minor determinants for dietary behaviors for the public and for the dietary culture.

Secondly, Tylor said that he contest of any field derives from the needs of the profession, the needs of the learner and the needs of society. Speaker said that we should consider the needs of consumer(the learner designated by Tylor), the profession and the society seriously. I agree with that opinion.

But in Korea, who is the profession for nutrition education or provide nutrition information to the public?

Slowly, nutrition education is getting acceptance by health professional of the concept that good nutrition can play an important role in the maintenance of optimal health and the prevention of disease. Consumer, they would like to have more information about nutrition and health. But they do get their needed information by chance. What I would like point out here, is that professionals like ourselves, did not find our position in this society as the nutrition information provider, yet.

We are living in the dynamic society. Korea changed rapidly economic, social, culturally during last half century. During last fifty years our people experienced the liberation, war, the division of our country, coup detat, revolutions and also economic development. One of each event can have enormous impact on our culture. Something can have influence on the culture. It can also have influence on the dietary culture. Thus, our dietary culture changed by socio-economic changes. Public did not need any nutrition informations to change their diet.

Now, there are so many informations which they can get easily. And people want more health related information to be healthy. They get nutrition informations during the porcess. These informations can influence on our diet in the future.

But professional ourselves are not fully prepared to answer for the public. In providing nutrition information we could not limit ourselves to the nutrition. Rather, we should give informtions about food and health which pointed by the speaker. Also, we should study economic, social, technological, and lifestyle trends and determinants to provide intergrated informations.

Margaret Mead said that all human beings require the same nutrients to meet their biological needs, yet the foods that supply these nutrients are as different as the environment in which people exist. We as professional know about nutrients in some degree. But we may not fully understand about foods in our culture and further information. Like the speaker said, there is much left to accomplish.