

SCHOOL LUNCH PROGRAM AND NUTRITION
EDUCATION IN JAPAN

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Introduction

The Japanese school lunch program has actually started after the second world war was over. At that time, with food shortages due to economic plight, the Japanese Government faced the urgent issue of improving nutrition for children.

The purpose of school lunch program at that time was to protect the children from starvation, to prevent from infectious diseases and to promote their normal growth and development under the severe food shortage.

In 1947, school lunch program started as the test stage in several cities and eventually nation wide. In those days, the school lunch menu offered mainly milk and some canned food supplied by the United States, the General Headquarters, and others.

In 1954, the School Lunch Law was enacted under the basic philosophy that the school lunch was a part of education at school. This law still dictated the administration of school lunch today.

Fifty years since the school lunch has started many issues regarding childrens health problems such as obese, hypolipemia so called lifestyle related diseases risk have been raised. For the prevention of the life style related diseases, nutrition education in especially young generation has one of the most important role. Now in the school lunch program, nutrition education is focused as the role of dietitian.

1. Implementation of the school lunch program

In 1951, so-called "complete lunch(menu)" started given to the children were consisted of bread, milk and side dishes. This form has been continued for many years. Forty five percent of schools in Japan had complete lunch at that time but only 20% of the school had school dietitian as a food service professionals.

As of May 1, 1996, 93.1% of all the compulsory schools implement a school lunch program : 11.93 million out of 12.81 million children enjoy school lunches. Some schools install their own kitchens : this is called "Individual Kitchen System". Others have "Common-Kitchen System, where a central food preparation center cooks for a number of compulsory schools together and "Commission System", which is processed on commission by the food delivery company.

The sufficiency rate of registered dietitian and dietitian in school lunch program is 90% and average 1.08 dietitians per 1 institute is put in position.

2. Nutrition education in the school lunch program

The job description for dietitians includes the following tasks : "participation in basic plans for the school lunch", "nutrition management", "School lunch instruction", "hygiene management", "inspection of food", "ingredients management", and "research and examination". In 1971, school lunch guideline was revised and the objectives of school lunch program has changed from the nutrients supply to the children, to learn a meal manner such as how to use chopstick, how to make good communication among teachers and children through the meal.

As health problems caused by undesirable diets have been increasing recently, dietitians' roles in instructing all the children in the basic knowledge of appropriate dietary habits and nurturing childrens' self health management skills are becoming more and more important. Nutrition education in school lunch program was positioned as a link in the chain of the important health education. This objective was learning about food and health relationship, formation of desirable food behavior and to build up a closer connection with region.

As a link in the chain of health education in school education, nutrition

education has been required to learn how to take healthy meal and the eating manner and food culture through the menu of school lunch as a live educational materials.

Furthermore, dietitians are expected to function as specialists who can give advice to the children and their parents with problems in their eating behavior and can provide appropriate information to families through the children.

In 1997, The Council of Ministry of Education, Science, Sport and Culture requested that the school dietitian should be in charge of nutrition education in the school. Then Ministry made a new position for the school dietitian as a special part-time instruction and their responsibility is nutrition education with class tutor which we call TT system(team-teaching with class tutor and professional stuff).

At present school dietitians are in charge of nutrition education in the school and at the same time the school lunch service is still remains in their hands. More attention must be paid to proper hygiene and sanitation when preparing school lunches in order to prevent food poisoning, such as the massive outbreak of severe O-157 food poisoning that occurred in 1996, that can be traced back to school lunches.

The school dietitians will play further crucial roles in the future : nutrition education in one hand and food service with safe and delicious tasty meal is in other hand.

REFERENCES

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