

D ANNEX

*Public Health Nutrition:
Philosophy and Professional Development
(7 August 1997)*

By courtesy of the Nutrition Society

Public Health Nutrition

Nutrition Society
7 August 1997

Public Health Nutrition: Document 1

PHILOSOPHY AND BACKGROUND

There is now wide agreement about the need for a public health approach to the prevention of the major nutrition related illnesses that affect all countries. Many countries have developed dietary guidelines promoting changes to the diet of the population with a view to improving health. Achieving these guidelines requires a population approach. Conducting an effective population based strategy requires people trained and competent in Public Health Nutrition. The European Union's recent mandate for action on public health (Article 129, Maastricht Treaty on European Union) is likely to generate demands for public health professionals within the EU.

The Role of the Nutrition Society

After considerable consultation, discussion and debate over the last three years, the Nutrition Society has agreed to take the lead in the registration of individuals working as Public Health Nutritionists and the accreditation of courses which offer training in Public Health Nutrition.

As the major body of nutrition scientists in the UK, with members across Europe and elsewhere in the world, the Nutrition Society is well placed to foster the development of the profession of Public Health Nutrition. In the short term, most progress is likely to be within the UK, but it is expected that this function can ultimately be developed outside the UK.

A number of the Society's members are either operating in a Public Health Nutritionist role or are involved in training nutrition graduates who could have the option of training for employment in Public Health Nutrition.

This paper sets out the philosophy behind this decision, which should be seen as part of the Society's wider plans for professional development in nutrition. (A process is now in place

via which members of the Society with appropriate academic qualifications and subsequent work experience can apply to be registered to use formal letters after their name which signify quality and proficiency in nutrition.)

A separate paper (*Public Health Nutrition: Document 2*) details:

- the agreed minimum standards of competence required to perform the functions of a Public Health Nutritionist
- the requirements and process for registration of individuals
- the requirements and process for accreditation of courses in Public Health Nutrition
- the structure in place to support and formalise this professional discipline.

By developing an agreed specification of the professional competencies required for Public Health Nutritionists, the Nutrition Society aims to achieve the following:

- Promote recognition of the need for the particular mix of expertise which is Public Health Nutrition;
- Set professional standards for the training of Public Health Nutritionists;
- Promote recognition of Public Health Nutritionists as a professional group;
- Create formal links between Registered Public Health Nutritionists who operate in different sectors;
- Promote wider knowledge of the role of Public Health Nutritionists;
- Provide a register of appropriately qualified individuals for interested parties both within and outside the Society.

A major objective of the process being undertaken by the Nutrition Society is to bring people together who, up to now, have not been recognised or organised up to now in a way that is optimal for personal or professional development.

Defining Public Health Nutrition

Public Health

The public health setting is the context in which a Public Health Nutritionist operates. The first step in defining the role of a Public Health Nutritionist is to clarify what is meant by public health. Public Health *is about promoting and maintaining good health in the whole population, including those who are well.* A public health approach requires a dynamic interaction between research, policy planning and service delivery to ensure that the most accurate evidence-based health messages are delivered in the best possible way.

Public Health Nutrition

Public Health Nutrition *focuses on the promotion of good health through nutrition and the primary prevention of diet related illness in the population.* The emphasis is on the maintenance of wellness in the whole population. It may include the identification of high risk and other groups within a population. It has recently been more broadly defined as:

"The art and science of promoting population health status via sustainable and equitable improvements in the food and nutrition system. Based upon public health principles, it is a set of comprehensive and collaborative activities, ecological in perspective an inter-sectorial in scope – including environmental, educational, economic, technical, and legislative measures." (Hughes and Somerset, 1997)

Public Health Nutritionists are involved in:

- the derivation of scientifically based information about diet that may reduce illness and promote good health, and in promoting an understanding of the potential causal relationships between diet and disease;
- the design, the execution, and the assessment of the effectiveness of the modes of delivery of this information appropriate to the population group or subgroup;
- the formulation of policy and programmes leading on from an analysis of the results of studies looking at the effectiveness of programmes.

Public Health Nutritionists may also be employed in an advisory capacity and influence relevant policy formulation without having been involved in the design of the messages or in evaluation programmes. Public Health Nutrition is not about counselling individual clients.

Employment opportunities (and placements) for Public Health Nutritionists

These include employment within:

- NHS provider trusts;
- district health promotion units in a Health Authority/Commission;
- local government authorities such as a Local Education Authority, Social Services or Environmental Health Department
- health/medical/scientific organisations (such as professional groups and charities);
- consumer/public interest organisations concerned with public health (such as voluntary groups and charities);
- the food industry or trade associations;
- government departments, related bodies and agencies
- academic department involved in nutrition research and teaching;
- institutes of public health medicine in universities/health authorities
- emergency relief and development aid programmes and projects (in Europe or elsewhere).

Membership of the Public Health Nutrition Development Group

Up to July 1996, the working group responsible for the consultation process

Convenor:

Barrie Margetts, Wessex Institute of Public Health Medicine, Southampton

Members:

Judy Buttriss, National Dairy Council, London

Paula Hunt, Health Education Authority National Unit for Health promotion in Primary Care, Oxford

Eleni Maunder, Leeds Metropolitan University, Leeds

Carol Williams, Freelance Consultant in International and Public Health Nutrition, London.

Public Health Nutrition Development Group (July 1996-July 1997)

Chair:

Barrie Margetts, Wessex Institute for Health Research and Development, Southampton

Members:

Ashley Adamson, Human Nutrition Research Centre, University of Newcastle, Newcastle

Judy Buttriss, National Dairy Council, London

Jackie Landman, Queen Margaret College, Edinburgh

Agneta Yngve, Unit of Preventative Nutrition, Karolinska Institute, Stockholm & WHO Collaborating Centre for Public Health Nutrition

Observer:

Robert Wenlock, Nutrition Unit, Department of Health, London.

Combined Public Health Nutrition Development Group / Professional Development Group (July 1997 to date)

Chair:

Judy Buttriss, National Dairy Council, London

Members:

Ashley Adamson, Human Nutrition Research Centre, University of Newcastle, Newcastle

Richard Cottrell, Sugar Bureau, London

Joyce Hughes, Department of Health, London

Jackie Landman, Queen Margaret College, Edinburgh

Tony Leeds, Kings College, London

Barrie Margetts, Wessex Institute for Health Research and Development, Southampton

David Parker, Human Nutrition Research Centre, University of Newcastle, Newcastle

Agneta Yngve, Unit of Preventative Nutrition, Karolinska Institute, Stockholm & WHO Collaborating Centre for Public Health Nutrition

Observer:

Robert Wenlock, Nutrition Unit, Department of Health, London.

Public Health Nutrition: Document 2

REGISTRATION OF INDIVIDUALS AND COURSE ACCREDITATION

This paper provides details on :

- the agreed minimum standards of competence required to perform the functions of a Public Health Nutritionist
- the requirements and process for registration of individuals
- the requirements and process for accreditation of courses in Public Health Nutrition
- the structure in place to support and formalise this professional discipline.

All applications for registration should be made to the **Development Officer:**

Nutrition Society, 10 Cambridge Road,
210 Shepherds Bush Road,
London W6 7NJ

Telephone: 0044 (0) 171 6020228 Fax: 0044 (0) 171 6021756

A separate paper (*Public Health Nutrition: Document 1*) is available which outlines the philosophy behind the Nutrition Society's decision to foster the formalisation and development of Public Health Nutrition.

How to Register as a Public Health Nutritionist

The details of how to apply for registration are outlined below. To assist in this process, the **minimum competencies required for registration** as a Public Health Nutritionist are to be found in pages 5-6 and Appendix 1, and a list of examples of professional functions that could be undertaken by a Public Health Nutritionist are to be found in Appendix 2.

- Registration in Public Health Nutrition is available to members of the Nutrition Society as part of the Society's professional development initiative. It is an extension of the system by which the Society's members can apply to use the title Registered Nutritionist and the letters R.Nutr. (*to be agreed, see covering memo*) after their name. (The title Registered Nutritionist replaces the title Accredited Nutritionist bestowed by the Institute of Biology (IOB) and it signifies that evidence has been provided of relevant academic achievement, and relevant work experience (a minimum of three years). Maintenance of this registration is subject to payment of an annual registration fee and continued membership of the Nutrition Society.
- Registration in Public Health Nutrition requires additional and specific qualifications and experience in Public Health Nutrition.
- To be eligible for registration in Public Health Nutrition, individuals must be members of the Nutrition Society, and once registered must pay an annual registration fee (set by Council). Maintenance of registration is subject to continued membership of the Society and payment of the annual registration fee.
- The registration process will be run by *registration committee* and overseen by the Nutrition Society. The decisions of the registration committee will be final. Appeals may be considered at the discretion of the committee. Registration will entitle the use of the letters *RPHN* and the title *Registered Public Health Nutritionist*.

Routes to Registration

1. **Members of the Society who are on the IOB register of Accredited Nutritionists (the old scheme):**

Such individuals need only supply specific details of experience in PHN. This could be in the form of a detailed CV which accompanies the completed application form.

Information should be provided concerning:

- i) units/courses (undergraduate or postgraduate) taken relevant to Public Health Nutrition
- ii) achievements/skills development since graduation relevant to Public Health Nutrition
- iii) Evidence of any relevant projects or placements undertaken during training or practice.

2. Members of the Society who have been granted the title Registered Nutritionist under the new scheme:

Such individuals need only supply specific details of experience in PHN. This could be in the form of a detailed CV which accompanies the completed application form.

Information should be provided concerning:

- i) units/courses (undergraduate or postgraduate) taken relevant to Public Health Nutrition
- ii) achievements/skills development since graduation relevant to Public Health Nutrition
- iii) evidence of any relevant projects or placements undertaken during training or practice.

3. Members of the Society with a degree in human nutrition / dietetics who are not on the IOB register and who have not applied for the title Registered Nutritionist:

Such individuals who wish to register in Public Health Nutrition need to provide detailed information about their academic training and their subsequent work experience. It is not necessary to apply for registration in nutrition prior to applying for registration in Public Health Nutrition.

Again this application can be in the form of a detailed CV to support the application from and should include:

- i) Evidence of academic qualifications in Human Nutrition and/or Dietetics:
 - a) Institution, year and degree obtained (eg photocopy of certificate to be submitted);
 - b) Summary of units/courses undertaken (eg subjects studied in the final year, exams taken) relevant to Public Health Nutrition (see pages 5-6 and Appendix 1);
 - c) Evidence of any relevant projects or placements undertaken during training or practice.
- ii) Evidence of achievements/skills development since graduation in one or more of the following areas:
 - a) A higher degree qualification (give details and provide photocopy of certificate);
 - b) Participation in educational activities which enhance basic degree training;
 - c) Recognition of professional expertise (eg publications).
- iii) Evidence of three years recent employment (in the past five years) in one or more of the following areas:
 - a) Health commission, trust or authority involved in nutrition-related health promotion;

- b) Health/medical/scientific organisations with a major involvement in nutrition;
- c) Consumer/public interest organisations concerned with Public Health Nutrition;
- d) Food industry or trade association, with nutritional science responsibilities;
- e) Government departments and related bodies (eg HEA);
- f) University academic departments undertaking research or training in Public Health Nutrition.

iv) Names of two people willing to act as referees (or signed statements attached from such referees).

In the early years of the scheme individuals applying for accreditation will not have graduated from Public Health Nutrition accredited courses.

- i) *Members of the Society with a degree in Human Nutrition or Dietetics who can demonstrate relevant experience in Public Health Nutrition (a minimum of 3 years in the last five) will be considered for registration on merit, as described above;*
- ii) *Members of the Society with a degree in a related discipline (eg medicine, biochemistry, physiology) who can demonstrate relevant experience in Public Health Nutrition (a minimum of 6 years in the last 8 to be agreed) will also be considered for registration on merit.*

4. Members of the Society who have graduated from accredited courses but who have not yet satisfied all of the above criteria (eg sufficient relevant work experience):

Such individuals will be eligible for provisional registration. This will normally be converted to full registration once proof has been submitted that the appropriate criteria have been satisfied and subject to ratification by the registration committee.

5. Members of the Society who have graduated from accredited courses but who have not yet satisfied all of the above criteria (eg sufficient relevant work experience):

Looking to the future, some members will eventually fall within this category. Such individuals will need to provide proof of graduation from an accredited course, together with proof of sufficient relevant work experience as outlined in 3(iii) above.

Minimum Competencies Required for Registration as a Public Health Nutritionist

To be eligible for registration (as outlined above) applicants must have specific demonstrable competencies. The areas of competence include those listed in detail below as well as those given in the Nutrition Task Force's report *Core Curriculum for Nutrition* ~~document~~ (see Appendix I), published by the UK's Department of Health in 1994. It is expected that individuals competent in Public Health Nutrition will be proficient in nutrition science, underpinned by the biomedical sciences (see section on course accreditation, page 7). It is an explicit requirement that all individuals have skills in communication (written and verbal) and information technology.

Competency (knowledge and understanding) is expected in all of the following (for example, studied at degree level):

- assessment of nutritional status with specific emphasis on applications at population level
- patterns of food, nutrient and dietary intakes in the national population, within the context of Europe; including the differences in patterns among sub-groups of the population
- the scientific basis of food safety including the metabolic effects of anti-nutrients, toxicants, additives, pharmacologically active agents (drugs) and other constituents of foods and the diet; nutrient-nutrient interactions
- the scientific basis of nutritional requirements and how these vary within the life cycle (physiological stage: growth and development, ageing; pregnancy and lactation) and with health status; and how they form the basis for nutritional guidelines or goals.
- the interactions among nutrition, lifestyle including physical activity, other health behaviours and genetic and other risk factors
- the psychological, social and cultural factors which influence food and dietary choices, and how to effect change through modification of these
- the principles and key components of the practice of health education and health promotion policies and programmes
- the aetiology of major public health problems at home and abroad in the context of the wider social (and historical) framework within which interactions between diet and health take place
- the translation of current scientific knowledge about relationships between nutrition and health into nutrition guidelines, and subsequently into targets and food-based advice which are relevant in socio-cultural contexts (considering differences by age, gender, ethnicity, and between different geographic regions), at population and /or sub-population levels

- nutritional surveillance and the identification of markers of nutritional status
- research study design, development of research protocols and the calibration of methods of investigation
- analysis of nutritional and other relevant data and databases; statistical issues; sampling, study size and power; appropriate analytical techniques
- design and implementation of intervention projects and programmes; methods for monitoring and evaluating effectiveness and efficiency
- sociology and politics of institutions, stakeholders, agents and agencies in national and global food and public health systems; sustainability and equity in public health nutrition programmes
- theory and critical appraisal of public health, food and nutrition policies at population (national and regional) and international levels.

Professional Structure

The Nutrition Society will award the title of Registered Public Health Nutritionist to suitably qualified individuals as outlined above. This award will entitle the person to use the initials RPHN after his or her name. To use the title an individual has to initially satisfy the entry requirements, to continue to be a member of the Nutrition Society, and to pay an annual registration fee. Every five years the individual will have to submit proof of on-going professional competence.

The registration process will be run by a registration committee, and overseen by the Nutrition Society.

The decisions of the registration committee will be final. Appeals may be considered at the discretion of the registration committee.

A professional support and development group will be established to act as the forum for Registered Public Health Nutritionists to meet and discuss matters of relevance to their on-going professional needs.

How to Apply for Accreditation of Courses in Public Health Nutrition

Institutions that can demonstrate that courses they offer meet the criteria set out below, will gain accreditation for these courses. Before approval can be given, evidence such as course documents and CVs of course staff will need to be scrutinised by the Registration Committee. More detailed guidance is available from the Nutrition Society.

The process of accreditation of courses will be run by the registration committee and overseen by the Nutrition Society. The decisions of the registration committee will be final. Appeals may be considered at the discretion of the registration committee.

General Requirements

- To be eligible for accreditation, courses must cover the **competencies expected of individuals eligible for registration as Public Health Nutritionists** as listed on pages 5-6 and must satisfy the criteria established in the Department of Health *Core Curriculum for Nutrition* (see Appendix I).
- It is acknowledged that the areas of study may also be part of the training required for qualification in human nutrition in general, but to be appropriate for Public Health Nutrition, courses should place **particular emphasis on the issues that are relevant for a population approach to improvements in nutrition.**
- The nutrition components of the course are expected to exceed the criteria specified by the Institute of Biology in 1991, i.e. that courses should:
 - * be based on a sound knowledge of biochemistry and animal physiology (which assumes an adequate foundation in chemistry and physics); and
 - * incorporate mathematics and elementary statistical manipulation and data analysis.
- It is an explicit requirement that communication skills (verbal and written) and information technology are covered, that the opportunity to demonstrate organisational skills is provided, and the ability to work in teams is developed.

- Courses are expected to equip students with levels of knowledge for the higher order cognitive skills of: integration, interpretation, application, critical appraisal and analysis; and the ability to undertake independent continuing education in Public Health Nutrition
- The syllabus should cover all of the theoretical topics listed on pages 5-6 in ways that encourage deep learning, to support and/or prepare for application in practice. Examples of appropriate teaching methods are simulation exercises or practicals such as in problem-based learning and case-studies.

For each topic, documentation will be required from the Higher Education Institution to demonstrate the expected level of cognitive learning outcomes in terms of:

- *knowledge and understanding*
- *analysis*
- *synthesis and creativity*
- *evaluation*

- It is accepted that individual Higher Education Institutions may differ in the emphasis given in their courses to: the theories and philosophies of education, sociology, communications and health promotion, statistics and epidemiology. However, it is considered that, to varying degrees, all of these underpin specialist roles and functions of the Public Health Nutritionist.

Guidance to Institutions

The following evidence will be required:

- 1) Statement from the leader or director of the course or programme of study to summarise the curriculum and guide the registration committee to those sections of the syllabus or curriculum that refer to the topics above under *General requirements* (in particular the minimum competencies listed on pages 5-6 and the topics in Appendix 1) and to the other requisites (itemised below). The statement should also describe how students are encouraged to develop good (written, oral and electronic) communication and interpersonal skills and/or how they are prepared for competence in these areas.

Where the Higher Education Institution is responsible for part of a programme of collaborative provision, this must be clearly indicated in the statement.

- 2) Statements about staff development activities and evidence of relevant research activity of the course team to show how the staff are supported to teach Public Health Nutrition at honours degree and/or postgraduate levels. This could take the form of a report on the research undertaken in the department(s), or it could comprise the CVs of relevant core staff e.g. the course leader or director and other staff who are referred to in the course documents (mentioned above).
- 3) Statement of the numbers and identities of staff who are members of the Nutrition Society and registered in Public Health Nutrition. It is expected that there will be at least ONE such member of staff for each course/programme leading to a qualification or short course that bears credit points. It is recognised that parts of an eligible course that leads to a formal qualification may be taught by qualified staff who are not eligible for registration in Public Health Nutrition.
- 4) Statement of the Higher Education Institution's willingness to be visited by (an) officer(s) of the Nutrition Society to advise on and/or investigate and/or verify good practice consistent with accreditation, at the Higher Education Institution's expense.
- 5) Detailed description of the syllabus/curriculum of the relevant course(s) or programme(s) of study. This could be a validation or definitive course document prepared for the Higher Education Institution's own Quality Assurance procedure or for a professional body (e.g. Dietitians' Board) or for the Teaching Quality Assessment exercise.
- 6) Examples of examination papers and brief descriptions of patterns of assessment used to show the levels of learning that students are expected to achieve in the Principles of Nutritional Science and in Public Health Nutrition.

Appendix 1

Core Curriculum for Nutrition in the Education of Health Professionals

The following broad topics should form a part of the basic education all Public Health Nutritionists should receive; the topics listed here complement the detailed and more specific list presented on pages 5-6.

A. Principles of Nutritional Science

1. Diets, foods and nutrients (substrates and cofactors)
2. Metabolic demand, digestion and absorption, balance and turnover, physical activity, metabolic effects of excess, obesity.
3. Requirements, essentiality, bioavailability, limiting nutrients, effect of nutrient status on biochemical and organ function.
4. Adaptation to low nutrient intakes, body composition (form and function).
5. Assessment of diet and nutritional status.
6. Physiological mechanisms that determine appetite, sociological, psychological, economic and behavioural aspects of food choice.

B. Public Health Nutrition

1. The average British diet, including subgroup differences (e.g. region, gender, ethnic origin), lifestyle, risk factors and epidemiology (socio-economic factors, smoking and activity).
2. Pre-conception, pregnancy, breastfeeding, infant nutrition, growth and development, ageing.
3. Dietary reference values (DRVs), dietary recommendations and guidelines, diet and coronary heart disease and stroke, the Health of the Nation targets.
4. Nutritional surveillance and identification of markers of nutritional status.
5. Achieving change, education and motivation (education resources, theory and skills).
6. Food supply, monitoring, cost/benefit of nutritional interventions, legislation, food labelling and policy which affects food composition.

C. Clinical Nutrition and Nutritional Support

1. Assessment of clinical and functional metabolic state, effect of functional state on nutritional intake and status, effect of status on clinical outcomes.
2. Anorexia and starvation, response to injury, infection and stress.
3. Altered nutritional requirements in relevant disease states, unusual requirements.
4. General principles of nutritional support, routes of support.
5. Basis of nutritional related diseases, therapeutic diets (diabetic, renal), weight reduction.
6. Drug-nutrient interactions.

Appendix 2

Professional Functions

The following are functions that could be undertaken by a Public Health Nutritionist depending on the organisation within which the person is based:

- to anticipate, identify, characterise and rank nutrition problems in the population, and to suggest strategies to address these problems;
- to be involved in operations and applied nutrition research;
- to participate in the design and conduct of nutrition related health promotion programmes aimed at populations, and to ensure that these programmes are evaluated and monitored;
- to inform policy makers and those involved in education and promotion programmes, of the extent to which identified objectives have been achieved;
- to inform and liaise with policy makers in related sectors to ensure the inclusion of nutritional considerations into the policies of these sectors and to evaluate the nutritional effects of policies in other sectors;
- to liaise with others in the public health setting; for example, those involved with matters which relate to food quality and safety;
- to help in the development of appropriate programmes of work on food and nutrition;
- to be involved in the nutrition education of personnel within the organisation in which he or she works;
- to participate in the development of Public Health Nutrition.