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Training Physicians in Clinical Nutrition - Undergraduate Needs

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As the nutritionally related problems of affluent society become defined, there is a renewed interest in clinical nutrition training at the undergraduate and post-graduate levels. The problems which must be addressed include obesity, atherosclerotic vascular disease, alcohol abuse, diabetes mellitus, neoplastic disease, dental caries and their nutritional correlates. There are also underprivileged groups in industrialised society and particular attention may need to be given to the growing proportion of elderly people. At the same time, a global perspective of under- and overnutrition is required. Other areas of importance include a basic understanding of food, its composition, the effects of processing and preservation and the nature of food toxicants. In a study by A.E. Dugdale et al (Food Nut. and Reviews, 35: 89 1978) medical students' knowledge of the energy value of food was grossly deficient. Nutritional epidemiology is another important area. Skills, too, are required in nutritional assessment and nutritional support. In a survey of views of Australian medical schools on the teaching of nutrition, the preference for multidisciplinary teaching in nutrition was clear, although the establishment of a human nutrition unit to facilitate this was suggested. Ultimately, clinical nutrition is practiced in a preventive and therapeutic way by family physicians, specialists in internal medicine, surgery, obstetrics and gynaecology, paediatrics and psychological medicine. So that thus, there must be nutrition teaching inputs in each of these areas.

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