

INTERCOLLEGIATE COURSE ON HUMAN NUTRITION

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In 1996, an Intercollegiate Working Group was set up to address the perceived need for postgraduate training, primarily for medical practitioners, in the broad discipline of nutrition. Over the past four years, representatives from 11 medical Royal Colleges, with financial support from Rank Prize Funds and other sponsors, have participated in developing an Intercollegiate Course on Human Nutrition.

It has been a substantial challenge to produce a course for an interdisciplinary group drawn from many medical specialities. The emphasis has been on basic principles of nutrition, which have common elements across the life cycle, across the range of disease states, and in both primary and secondary health care settings. This has been achieved by clarifying key concepts and learning outcomes, and through the use of areas of practice to exemplify the underlying principles. Topics covered include: the assessment of nutritional status; nutritional requirements in health and in prevention and treatment of disease; the assessment and management of nutritional abnormalities and ethical and psychological issues, using an evidence-based approach.

The breadth and depth of the agreed curriculum had proved to be greatly appreciated by participants and evaluations from each course have been very positive. Special comment has frequently been made regarding the benefits of interdisciplinary working at the course. Feedback after each course has ensured a continuous programme of refinements and improvements, in relation to handouts, homework exercises and the balance between presentations and the various forms of interactive sessions, which include problem solving, case discussions and some practical exercises.

Two courses were held in 1999 and three in 2000 (Southampton, Dunkeld and Nottingham) and a further three are planned for 2001. The format of a five-day residential course, shortened on the first and last day to facilitate travel, has proved popular. Recruitment has been by advertisement in the *British Medical Journal*, information to Postgraduate Deans, and increasingly by word of mouth. Twenty to thirty participants attend each course.

The course is the ownership of the Intercollegiate Group on Nutrition, and delegated College representatives have played a key role in the development and delivery of the course, with dietitian, pharmacist and nursing assistance. There is now an experienced cohort of College trainers and a growing group of new trainers. An on-going challenge is to support new trainers so that the course is effectively franchised to each site, with virtually the same course being given on each occasion. To facilitate this, a common set of take-home messages and specific guidelines for the trainers and chairmen have been prepared. A course management team, which includes an experienced medical educationalist, has been established to review the programme, the materials and the details of course administration.

Participants receive a Certificate of Attendance and where relevant of CPD/CME. There are not as yet any formal arrangements for an intercollegiate qualification, although there have been some preliminary discussions regarding how attendance at the intercollegiate course might contribute towards a diploma qualification in certain areas of nutrition.

In summary, it is hoped that the Intercollegiate Course on Human Nutrition is increasingly providing doctors with an understanding of the principles on which they will be able to give rational advice on nutritional aspects of prevention and treatment of disease, both in hospital and in the community. Further information regarding the future courses can be obtained from the website www.icgnutrition.org.uk; the site also carries links to other nutrition sites, as well as to the websites of the participating Colleges.