

## THE EFFECT OF NUTRITION INSTRUCTION UPON THE FOOD CONSUMPTION OF THE CHILDREN IN THE OKLAHOMA HOSPITAL FOR CRIPPLED CHILDREN

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The children in the Oklahoma Hospital for Crippled Children usually have capricious appetites. They do not eat the foods they should or in desirable amounts. As their food intake frequently is important in their recovery, any plan to improve their appetites is important. The purpose of the present study was to see if definite, purposeful nutrition instruction could have any effect. Also, it was hoped that the study would show the Department of Dietetics at the Hospital how the hospital menus can be adapted to meet the needs of the children.

The children on general diets in three of the wards were used as subjects. One ward had girls from five to twenty-one years of age, one had boys twelve to twenty-one years and one had boys five to fifteen years. The food consumption records of 178 patients were used. The food records of the boys and girls were kept separate, and each of these classes was divided into various age groups.

A food consumption check sheet was developed for checking the food intake and the food not eaten. The purpose and plan of the study were explained to all of the dietitians, nurses, tray girls and cooks. Only standard size dippers and spoons were used for serving the foods. In this way a more accurate check on the food intake could be made. The younger children were usually served smaller portions and were allowed second helpings.

There was first a one week pre-instruction period, September 1 to 7, inclusive, during which the daily food consumption was recorded. From September 8 to January 2 the food consumption was checked one day of each week, a different day each week. From January 4 to 10 there was another period of complete checking, followed by the random checking, one day a week, from January 12 to April 24. The last checking was one week of complete checking from April 24 to 30. By this method it was possible to include different seasons of the year and different periods in each patient's stay at the hospital. A total of 35 checking periods and 780 food consumption records of the patients were obtained. However, not all were usable.

After the pre-instruction week of checking, the various types of nutrition instruction were started. One type was the nutrition classes which were planned with the help of the hospital supervisors and regular teachers in the school maintained for the children. Classes were held one day a week, for thirty minutes, in the auditorium, which is a pleasant room, comfortable and convenient. Lesson plans for the semester were developed, but they had to be flexible because of the wide age range and the mobility of the group. Children unable to attend the classes were given special instruction. Also, the other children acquainted them with what had happened in the classes.

The lessons included a discussion of foods necessary for a day and the individual foods as sources of the nutrients. Each meeting time there was a quick review of the previous lesson. Teaching aids were blackboard diagrams, moving pictures, films, flat pictures that could be examined and passed around, displays of foods, and books with good stories about foods and their uses. There was also a rat experiment that proved most interesting to the children. The lessons on milk included a film on the value of milk, called "Skinny and Husky", line drawings on the blackboard and samples of milk in various forms. There was also a plant growing experiment. Altogether,

there were twenty-six lesson topics. Another feature was that the regular teachers used every opportunity to discuss nutrition and food with the children in the other classes.

So far as results are concerned, most of the children showed very little, if any, improvement in their food habits. Two boys made a little progress, especially in the amount of green and yellow vegetables eaten. The others, however, showed variable states. It was felt that the reasons for the lack of improvement were the mobility of the group (few children were in the hospital very long, and some were in and out), the physical condition of the children (limited activity and participation in the study), well-established food habits which the children already had, the serving of new and unfamiliar foods in new and strange surroundings, old familiar foods served in a new way, derogatory remarks about foods made by some of the older children.

An attempt was made to learn from the classroom teachers at the school, the dietitians, the nurses, and from a few parents who were interested whether they considered the nutrition instruction worthwhile even though there was little apparent improvement. All felt the work was valuable and that there had been improvement in the attitudes towards the values of a correct diet. It was also felt that the study was of value to the Department of Dietetics as it gave the dietitians ideas of ways to improve the service.

The recommendations are as follows: a more careful study of adaptation of the master menu of the hospital to the needs of children, and of ways to make the food more acceptable, easier to eat and the service more attractive. It was felt that possibly smaller servings with a chance for second helpings would be a useful plan. More individual assistance and encouragement to each child, special attention to the preparation and serving of vegetables, all can help.

Nutrition classes would be useful. However, there should be a separation into different age groups instead of having the children all together. Having the lessons definitely planned once a week will be helpful. If the work could be accredited for the high school girls, as other subjects are, there would be greater interest. As many teaching aids as possible such as visual aids, food models and animal experiments should be used. More time for the instruction is needed and also a feeling that nutrition instruction is important, not an extra. Nutrition instruction for the parents will help a great deal. All of these suggestions it is felt will be of value in improving the dietary habits of the future patients in the Oklahoma Hospital for Crippled Children.

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