

EDITORIAL

Times change

One of the most interesting aspects of an Editor's life is watching the science of nutrition evolve through the papers submitted for publication, and it is this aspect that I think I will miss most.

I was very conscious of this evolutionary process during the Summer Meeting in Aberdeen when I heard a paper on the molecular architecture of the lipase enzymes and their conformational changes as they were activated. My thoughts took me back to a crowded meeting in the Chemistry lecture theatre at Cambridge in the 1950s, as an enthralled audience of biochemists was taken through the early ideas on the nature of the genetic code.

One of the fascinations of research to me is that as understanding evolves one sees the resolution of some perplexing questions. Increasingly detailed knowledge, in a strange way, simplifies and clarifies what appeared to be contradictions. It is also true that the resolution of one question raises several others, and this was brought home to me during another presentation in Aberdeen where it was clear that despite the advances in understanding the molecular structure of important biological systems some even more challenging questions remain to be addressed. Why for example do the glucose transporters have such a complex structure? Do we understand sufficiently the key elements for structural activity to design a transporter system? And, even more intriguingly, how did such a structure evolve?

The Aberdeen meeting, in addition to providing some superb examples of how advances in the molecular biological sciences are increasing our understanding of the responses to diet and its components, also provided some sessions where one had a sense of *déjà vu*. Discussions on the effects of stunting on subsequent growth and development, for example, have been a continuing topic of concern since the foundation of the Society. Similarly, it was disturbing to have to continue to consider the nutritionists' responses to the consequences of war and the plight of refugees, again a topic of great concern at the first meetings of the Society. The large Summer Meetings are clear evidence of the strength of nutrition and the large numbers of short communications create a great deal of editorial work both for the Proceedings Editor and the Editorial Office. Such meetings are, nevertheless, the life blood of the Society. I am, however, always amazed by the variety of interpretations that are made of the instructions to contributors of abstracts; we fondly imagined that going to camera-ready copy would reduce the work-load!

Perambulating around the posters was an interesting experience and reinforced the view of a vibrant, active Society. One could only marvel at the power of desk-top publishing packages to generate glossy posters in multicoloured splendour. Sometimes I had the feeling that some authors believed that the glossy presentation was all that was required of them, but I wondered whether there was a need to specify the expected nature of posters more explicitly. I think that more attention should be given to the graphical presentation of protocols and findings and to limiting the use of enlarged typescript. There were of course many posters that were both glossy and scientific and took advantage of the opportunities that a good poster presentation provides.

I was disappointed that some authors' presentations did not give any impression of how their work formed part of the evolution of nutritional science, and it appeared that in their

efforts to present their own work in the best possible light it was necessary to discount or ignore the findings of past work.

Anyone who has thought about the development of scientific ideas will realize that 'new' ideas are almost invariably founded on the ideas and work of previous workers.

We should not allow the current climate of competition to restrict our presentations to those that impress in a superficial, glossy way or use the techniques of PR to 'puff' current work and ignore the proper etiquette of scientific communication.

One theme that recurred in informal discussions was the critical issue of research funding, especially for maintaining the longer-term studies on which nutrition depends and the establishment of in-depth expertise. One of the primary requirements for success in research was recognized by the German Scientists in the nineteenth century as 'geld' and I suppose that nothing has really changed, although the relative amounts of funding required in relation to the personal funds of an individual researcher are very different. I had a sneaking feeling that the justification for some studies was increasingly becoming dominated by financial considerations rather than that the topic was intrinsically scientifically important and I have some concerns that there are now strong temptations to sell one's scientific soul.

Time to go.

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