

## ROLE OF NUTRITION IN A DEVELOPING COUNTRY

by

Dr. Vijaya Upadhyaya<sup>⊙</sup>  
M.B.,B.S., M. Sc. (Nutrition)

Nepal, as many other south East Asian countries, is in her developing stage. We have got to pace hard to catch up many privileged nations in several categories of development. In the medical field in our country, due emphasis is given in curative medicine compared to the preventive one. Actually as it should have been the other way round. Every body knows that "Prevention is better than cure," but strangely still we wait to become sick!

At present about 400 million children are living in underdeveloped areas of the world and are growing on low protein calories diets. These findings are all the more disturbing as far as the future of malnourished children of our nation is concerned. The nutritional disorder is a basic problem in preschool children, many diseases taking serious course in this segment of population. There would be no exaggeration therefore in saying that many of us come across diseases of such nature in hospital, health centres and in physician's chambers. In addition to this hundreds of malnourished infants remain untreated and die unnoticed. These countless cases of infantile malnutrition cause increasing concern for not only the future health and wellbeing of the nation but also for the material uplift of the country. In fact it is a rarity to see well-nourished child after the age of one year or so in the low socio-economic community. This is because of poverty in family, ignorance of the mother about the need of growing baby and inavailability of the baby food in the country. Thus one can see that Nutrition plays a major role in paediatric discipline. One must remember that the mortality and morbidity rate is high in the preschool children.

The rate will be still higher among undernourished children. It has been proved already that there is certainly some relationship between Nutrition and infection. Naturally therefore undernourished children are more prone to infectious diseases like smallpox, typhoid; and they also suffer more severely than the well-fed one.

Infestations with roundworm, hookworm etc. is also common in undernutrition. On the other hand people enjoying good nutrition are placed in a more advantageous

<sup>⊙</sup> Medical Officer, Kanti Hospital.

position. Nutritional disorder like Kwashiorkor or anaemia become complicated with acute diarrhoea, measles, chicken-pox or whooping cough, ending up in deaths. These diseases do not usually prove fatal in the case of children who are well-fed. Improvement of the common man's nutritional status is therefore no doubt important. Better sanitary and hygiene are to be provided also.

The another vital point it plays is in family planning and Maternal and Child health programme. Family Planning programme will have more impact if the health of existing children could be guaranteed. Nutrition education will help in lessening the problem of malnutrition. Mothers if well motivated can do a lot for their children. It is well known fact that Vit. A is needed for rhodopsin. Vit A deficiency in the diet among preschool children have led to blindness. Night blindness is a warning signal that the eye is getting damaged. Blindness caused by Vit A deficiency is a major socioeconomic problem. The cause may be lack of vit. A rich food among pregnant women, or due to social taboos. So Nutrition education, if given to the antenatal mothers will lessen this frightful condition. Another important problem is Anaemia among pregnant women because of high demand for iron by the mother and foetus. The mothers are not aware of the food stuff which are rich in iron. In M.C.H Clinic classes are very useful to combat dietary deficiency anaemia. It is also known that infant born to anaemic mothers have less iron stores and are prone to suffer from anaemia from the early day of the life.

The need for good nutrition during antenatal period cannot be overemphasised. The baby's birth weight is directly related to the mother's diet. That is why infants borne to women eating poor diets have lower birth weights than the average birth weight of babies delivered by well fed mothers. Furthermore inadequate diet during pregnancy leads to high infant death rate during first few days of their life. The infants are more prone to infection too.

The more serious problem is that malnutrition in infancy may cause mental defect. Low birth weight infants of undernourished mother may suffer from inadequate mental development. It has also been seen that malnutrition impairs learning behavior, because of low I.Q.

In conclusion it can be said that malnourishment is the end result of variety of factors with the limitation of mental capacity which may result from malnourishment in early infancy. In underdeveloped country this will be an additional burden if proper remedy is not sought soon. There is no blanket solution for the problem of malnutrition except assigning priority to infant's food and nutrition. The children's hospitals should run nutrition clinic, and the same applies to the MCH centres all over the country. Welltrained personell should be mobilised for this. By neglecting proper nutritional requirements of to-day's infant we may be heading towards mentally deficient citizens.