Health and Nutrition Education

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No programmes of health can suceed unless they are adequately based on education or that programmes of health succeed better when they are accompanied by those of educational diffussion. Health, for instance, is as much a social as an individual responsibility and proper health education of an individual is the basic foundation for all health services. Individual must know about the functioning of the human body, the disorders and disturbances which may arise therein (including their causes and methods of control), prevention of diseases, healthy food practices, importance of exercise and regular habits and the need for discipline and self control.

Where individuals get the necessary informetion about health, learn the essential health skills and develop proper attitudes and values to health problems, the quality of health rises considerably and the provision of health-services becomes correspondingly easier.

Health is also a community responsibllity and the health of individuals wiil often depend upon the maintenance of a proper social and natural environment. For exampie, it is impossible to organize a good programme of public sanitation through legislation or paid employees. No doubt, these are necessary, but the best results are obtained only if every person is educated to realize the significance of proper sanitation and is trained and disciplined not to pollute the environment. Infact, it has been shown by practical experience in country after country that the improvement in public sanitation through proper public education has been one of the most effective means of improving general health of the people.

The same is true of medical services provided by Goverment whose effectiveness depends more on the education of the public than on any other factor. This is proved even by the experience of our own country.

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It is, therefore, evident that for proper human resource development and obtaining the best results, programme of health and education will have to be developed in an integrated fashion and simultaneously.

Health Problems.

There are major health problems which affect large number of people in our country. Let us take a few examples, e.g. tuberculosis, leprosy, malaria, malnutrition in children, diarrohoea in children, high infant mortality and over-population.

Why are they problems ? Is it because the medical solution is not known ? Is it because medical services are not available ? or is it because the people do not use the services properly and do not follow the required behaviour at home ?

A tuberculosis patient will take treatment till he feels better and then he will see no point in continuing: later he may become resistant to available drugs and a threat not only to himself but to the community. A leprosy patient may be afraid to come for treatment at all. Or in the early stages may just not realise he has a serious disease. Malnutrition although largely due to poverty also could be much reduced if mother appreciated the importance of giving their children more food in adequate quantity and quality. Vitamin A deficiency could be easily prevented by giving green leafy vegetables with negligible cost. Diarrhoea could be prevented by better hygiene but villagers do not think that this, is important. When the child is dehydrated, they believe in the power of mantrans alone and often do not seek medical care. Infant and maternal mortality could be reduced by a better diet for pregnant women and more antenatal, natal, post-natal, infant and child care but the village women do not see the need for these. Family planning services are available but they are not fully used.

Need of Health Education for Behavioural Change.

So what is needed ? It is to change people's behaviour and this is difficult to do. We can say as in the above conversation that people are ignorant and obstinate so that nothing can be done. But this may be just a way of excusihg our own faulty technique. There is a science of behaviour, and ways of bringing about change have been extensively studied.

Health education is not just giving talks and showing pictures. Would that be enough to change peoples behaviour ? Nor is it only telling facts. Health education is based on the behavioural sciences-social psychology, sociology and social anthropology. Insight obtained from studies in these fields can be applied to the problem of changing people's behaviour. Merely to hand-out information by means of talk etc. it is like handing out drugs without first making a diagnosis, and without relating the particular local symptoms to the physiology and pathology of the body as a whole.

Need of Nutrition Education.

"Freedom from Hunger" is the cry of the day in the developing and underdeveloped countries. Increase in food production is the immediate answer. But the production without proper utilisation will be wasteful. It has been estimated that even if adequate food is produced, millions would be barred from enjoying the benefits of good nutrition because of their ignorance about the relationship between food and health. Therefore, while agricultural scientists are engaged in finding ways of increasing production, the nutritionists need to concern themselves in educating people on how best to utilize what is produced

The need for imparting nutrition education to children of school age is even more pressing since various studies and surveys have revealed a high degree of incidence of mainutrition among children. This calls for active health education programmes to improve the food practices in the community. Children in schools and outside need to be taught the ways to choose foods which would promote optimum growth and health.

Nutrition education is concerned not only with what the individual knows, but with what he does about food and his diet.

"Establishment of Food Habits" means maintaining those present food habits which are desirable as well as forming such new ones as are necessary to meet ths nutritional needs of the individual. Thus; the emphasis in nutrition education is not on change, but on improvement of or adding to present food patterns. The "individuals" need" are physiological, social, economic and cultural as influenced by age, sex. occupation or type of activity and individual variability. An individual selects his food according to his culturally imposed patterns of behaviour.

Objectives of Nutrition Education.

The main purposes of education in nutrition in schools and communities are to help pupils individuals and their families to :

(i) Appreciate that nutrition is essential for health, well being growth and vitality.

(ii) Understand the simple principles of good nutrition and basic food values.

(iii) Select the right kind of foods and secure adequate diets within the limits of purchasing power, local production and availability in the community.

(iv) Apply proper method of cooking and hygienic practices in the handling of food.

Target Groups for Nutrition Education.

The principal target of nutrition education is the family. Education programmes need to be directed towards the entire family in order that the expected goals may be achieved. Initial attention should be necessarily focussed on expectant and nursing women and children, who are most