

NUTRITIONALLY SPEAKING

by

George E. Meinig, D.D.S.

LEARNING TO INTERPRET CONFLICTING HEALTH DATA

Dear Dr. Meinig: Enclosed is an article that illustrates how conflicting information is spread by the "highly educated." Care to comment in the OVN? I view this article as outrageous and totally biased. E.C.N.

Dear E. C. N.: You are certainly a sharp, discerning individual. The average person would joyfully accept Elizabeth Whelan's exhortation, especially upon learning of her nutritional background and presidency of the American Council on Science and Health.

To summarize Whelan's claims for our OVN readers, she states that the media and special interest groups have created unreasonable, detrimental fear of cancer among millions of Americans; the need for the use of pesticides and chemicals on food, such as Alar on apples, are sensationalized, gross exaggerations that have intimidated the public; we are not a sick society, but are healthier than ever because of how long our people now live; and there isn't a cancer epidemic going on, ^{as} most cancer rates have been constant for decades.

The Council on Science & Health's objectives to inform the public of misleading propaganda are certainly commendable and in the case of the media, we must agree with them that the T.V. and the press frequently sensationalize and over-dramatise health information. However, while her claims will generally leave individuals happy with her view of things, I agree with you that most of the charges Ms. Whelan makes in this article are outrageous.

Whenever such ^{information} appears in the press I usually suspect the person or organization authoring ^{it are} acting as an undercover spokes-

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man for the industries or groups their ^{is} reporting [^] about. It is customary for such companies as pesticide manufacturers, the drug industry, food industrial companies, etc., to employ or financially support health professionals ^{for the purpose of giving} authoritative meaning to the groups' activities. Being aware of such conflicts of interest by well-known doctors is often difficult to detect.

In this case my investigation disclosed the Council of Science & Health has only 176 members and a million dollar a year budget. On a call to their office they said that they had numbers of sponsors but couldn't say who any of them ^{are, nor does their brochure.}

Though they claim they are not a front for industry, after this critique, you can decide for yourself whether or not this is another case where the main ^{undisclosed} sponsors are huge organizations such as the drug or pesticide industries. They become very unhappy and concerned when new scientific developments ^{recieve publicity that} hurt sales of their group.

First, let's examine Whelan's claim that most cancer rates have been constant for decades. My call to the American Cancer Society this morning found, that despite the billions that have been spent on cancer research, the total number of new cases during 1990 are estimated to be 1,040,000, and this year, 1,100,000. The Cancer Society's ^{yearly} "Facts and Figures" booklet from my files shows that the rate in 1979 was 765,000. It would seem with such increases and the current million a year occurrence of new cases makes cancer a disease of epidemic proportions.

A big issue was made in the article about the Alar pesticide affair. Whether or not that was overly dramatized, the charge is still being investigated. The real question isn't the small amount of ^{pesticides} involved on any one food item, but the effect on our systems of the ^{mixing together} and accumulation ~~and mixing~~ ^{chemicals} of so many different [^] that are present in almost all foods, plus the action of these chemicals on the environment.

The public's growing discontent with our country's agriculture policies and overuse of chemicals indicates a good many of you are quite aware of the problems facing us.

If Whelan is right that we are a "healthier than ever society": why do men in 22 other countries have a higher life expectancy; why does our infant mortality rate rank fourteenth; why do 1,040,000 get cancer; why do 19,000,000 have heart disease; why was there a need for 250,000 hysterectomies; ~~10,000,000~~ why do 30 million have sinusitis and the same number have arthritis, bursitis and high blood pressure; why do 20 million have allergies; five to eight million have asthma, cataracts, diabetes and migraines; why do one million have menstrual troubles and kidney stones; and why is there such an ever growing number of other degenerative diseases?

A good many people can't believe these statistics are relevant because our people are living so much longer. For a science organization and their president to use our longevity to ^{foster} argument about the goodness of our health status is inconceivable. The facts are well known. People are living to older ages because more infants are saved by modern medicine than in 1900 and because doctors have made such great strides in controlling infectious diseases. Improved sanitation and surgical efficiency have also played a big part. However, the actual increase in longevity for those who reach 40 years of age is only about three years. The availability of a bigger variety of fresh foods all year long that are now available should have improved our longevity even more but it has been offset by our peoples' excessive consumption of refined foods, sweets, soft drinks and other beverages.

It is these junk food items that have led to the vast increase in

degenerative diseases. Coming to grips with the corrective measures has been something the public and the medical profession have not been inclined to tackle. Now that seems to be changing.

People are beginning to take control of their lives. Rather than continue consuming the common, average diet, reasonable numbers are finding the search for optimum nutrition a worth while life-style adjustment.

~~So many have done so~~ ^{during the last 20 years} that we have witnessed a 30 percent reduction in the number of cardiac cases and this is only one area of improvement that is occurring.

A key thing that has slowed the development of the prevention concept is the public's feeling that good diet practices are more expensive. Though numbers of studies going back 25 to 35 years clearly demonstrated this belief to be untrue, it is only recently, after further investigation^{or}, that it became quite clear how better dietary practice materially reduced health care cost and hospital expense. Insurance companies, industrial firms, hospitals and even the president are beginning to think they should look into the possibility.

Money talks. With the evidence now available, it is not too hard to see that the 1990s will prove to be the decade of prevention.