

Address Delivered at the Opening Ceremony

By

**H.E. Sheikh Nahayan Bin Mubarak Al-Nahayan
Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research and
Chancellor of U.A.E. University**

Honoured Guests
Ladies & Gentlemen

It gives me great pleasure to welcome you to this workshop which deals with a topic of great importance, namely the relationship of nutrition to chronic diseases in the Arab Middle East Countries.

This topic, as you well know, is closely related to the economic and social developments that determine the quality of life in our society and influence food consumption patterns and habits that are beginning to spread in our societies.

The convening of this Conference comes at a time when the University is directing its research activities towards areas of emphasis that are applied and closely linked to the needs of our community and its well-being.

In all these efforts, we are guided by H.H. Sheikh Zayed Bin Sultan Al-Nahayan, the President, who emphasized that this University be a center of excellence of research that serves the community well by diagnosing its needs and providing feasible solutions to problems that affect the life of every individual.

It is now well established that the types of food and eating habits of every community have an influence on chronic non-communicable diseases. Simultaneously, as countries all over the world move towards guiding their people to better eating habits such as less fat, sugar, salt, artificial additives, we in the Arab World are moving away from our old healthy eating habits. We continue to acquire some foreign eating habits that create nutritional and health problems as well as create economic burdens on our countries.

We are aware of the improvements that have taken place in the health status of our population such as reduced mortality rates. However, we also know that these achievements are being threatened by the bad food habits which will increase the death rate in our society especially in middle-aged and senior groups and lead to a rise

in the cost of medical care in the country. This will undoubtedly reflect negatively in our plans to move forward with health services.

The close relationship between nutrition and non-communicable chronic diseases and the resultant effect on the well-being of our society, require a joint and concerted effort on the part of the individual as well as the society at large. To accomplish this, let me suggest the following approach or scenario :

1. We should look at nutrition and eating habits in the context of medical prevention measures. This will require changing to better food habits which will decrease the occurrence of these non-communicable chronic diseases as evident in the scientific literature the world-over.
2. We should strongly strive to promote good nutrition and eating habits through implementation of a viable public awareness program with emphasis on a 'healthy diet'. This campaign will also emphasize nutrition education, overnutrition, and bad eating habits.
3. We should all exert special efforts in explaining our traditional diet in the Arab and Gulf countries with emphasis on the food items that evolved under our local conditions. Efforts should also concentrate on conducting scientific studies to improve the nutritional value of our diet, amount to consume in a healthy manner, and ways to reduce food wastage.
4. We should also formulate national policies and strategies in consultation with the agricultural and medical groups. These policies should clearly spell out guidelines for proper nutrition, suggest means and ways of carrying out joint programs among all relevant parties, define research and development needs and outline criteria for evaluation and follow-up.

We should also bring to focus all other issues that are of paramount importance to food and nutrition. These are, to mention a few, production and importation of food, nutrition education, public awareness programs, scrutiny of food advertisements, preventive and treatment measures of non-communicable chronic diseases as well as promotion of scientific research and its application in human nutrition and health.

I would like to close by welcoming you all once again in our country and wishing you the best in your deliberations and discussions.

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By

**Dr. N.J. DAGHIR, DEAN,
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UAE University**

It is indeed both an honour & a pleasure to address you at this occasion, the opening of the Workshop on Nutrition and Chronic Diseases in the Arab Middle East Countries. The idea of organizing this workshop comes as a result of the urgent need to assess, analyze, and understand the very rapid changes in the dietary habits of the people of the M.E. region in general and the gulf region in particular and the consequent effect on their health. It also comes at a time to inaugurate the department of Food Science and Nutrition at the Faculty of Agricultural Sciences in the UAE University and launch its local and regional activities. This department has been newly established and was installed to answer to the rising need of professionals in Food Science and Nutrition.

The question may be raised at this time as to what is the role of Nutrition Education in an Agricultural Faculty and in the University at large. Before I answer this question, I would like to ask an even more general question and that is what is Nutrition and what do the Nutritional Sciences cover ?

Nutrition means different things to different people and one's understanding of the term usually reflects his own particular interest or involvement in the field. Thus, the concept of nutrition held by the molecular nutritionist is not the same as that of a whole animal or a population nutritionist. The one common ground of agreement is that nutrition is an applied science rather than a basic one. One definition of the nutritional sciences includes a comprehensive spectrum of the science of food, the nutrients that make up foods, the chemistry & physiology of utilization of those nutrients and ultimately the set of complex relationships of food & nutrients and their consequent effects on the health & well-being of all people. Therefore, it is a science that concerns all people and pertains to humanity at large.

Let me now go back to the original question and that is the role of an agricultural Faculty in nutrition education. It is well known that the origins of much of nutrition as a science developed in agriculture- oriented research. This was because the solution of problems in animal nutrition was recognized to be a necessary step

toward improvement of food production and utilization. The problems of animal production led to such work as the studies of energetics, the discovery of several of the vitamins and trace minerals, and the development of plant protein resources. Agricultural scientists therefore have played a major role in the development of our basic knowledge of nutrition principles and their applications to food production and use. The Food Sciences are an integral part of the broad field of Nutritional Sciences. Agriculturists in any nation are usually concerned in having enough food for all people in that nation to eat, but they need to be concerned in providing people with enough information to know what and how to eat. Safeguarding the nutritional content of food is as essential as maintaining its abundant supply. Merely by producing food we do not solve the problems of malnutrition. The presence of an abundance of these foods accentuates the problems of getting these foods to the people who need them most. To accomplish this, there must be greater emphasis on nutrition education, on the processing, marketing, distribution and delivery of foods to the consumer. Access to food itself and also to information about a healthy diet and the safe handling of food, is a right of every human being on the face of this globe. Regardless of their professional interest, university students in any faculty should be exposed to nutrition as part of their general education. This is particularly important if graduates get into teaching or extension work after graduation or other public welfare programs.

We have started at this University a general education elective course in human nutrition open to all students in this University. After three years of starting this course, we are proud to say that student enrollment in it is higher than in any other elective course offered at this University.

Realizing the importance of nutrition education, the U.S. which is one of the biggest food producers in the World has taken several steps in that direction. For example, more than half of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's \$ 68 billion budget is spent on nutrition programs. Some of these programs feed more than 25 million children lunch each school day or provide groceries for more than 27 million families through the Food Stamp program.

Nutrition information today is available thru several computer-based systems. Electronic Bulletin Boards and databases are an important method of information exchange. They are available around the clock, so information is available whenever it is needed. Nutrient Data Bank Bulletin Board sponsored by the Human Nutrition Information services in the U.S., provides information about the current publications and computer files on nutrient composition of foods. There is also an International Food & Nutrition Database.

This is besides the bibliographic databases, namely AGRICOLA and QUERRI (Questions on University Extension Regional Resource Information).

The preparation of this program, reminded me of the yearly symposia held on Near East Nutrition & Health at the American University of Beirut during the late sixties & early seventies. The subjects at that time were on Protein-Calorie Malnutrition. It is interesting to note that today, about 25 years later, we are dealing with overnutrition and the problems that are covered are those of affluent societies mainly. There has been a tremendous shift in nutritional problems of the area and our relative concern to these various problems.

We at this University are committed to serve the whole region and particularly the Gulf region in nutrition education, research and services. We are prepared to assist in any way possible and our job should not be too difficult for it has often been said that the story of Nutrition is one of the most dramatic stories in modern day science and every effort must be made on the part of nutritionists to bring this story to the public.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank H.E. Sheikh Nahayan Bin Mubarak Al-Nahayan - Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research and Chancellor of UAE University for his patronage of this workshop as well as for his continued guidance and help in the programs of our Faculty. Thanks are also due to all our guests who accepted our invitation and to all those on the Faculties of Agricultural Sciences and Medicine & Health Sciences that participated in preparing for it. Special thanks go to Dr. M. Afifi, our Associate Dean who chaired the arrangements committee and Dr. A. Musaiger, the chairman of the technical committee. We would also wish to acknowledge the cooperation and help of the Ministry of Health, the FAO and WHO in putting this program together. Finally, I would like to thank Nestle's Company for their financial support of this workshop. I wish you all a successful workshop and a very pleasant stay in the Garden City of Al-Ain.