

## Review of First Annual Conference

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The first of these annual meetings was in Seattle in 1976. It came about because we had been presented a data base and two programs. We began to use the programs instead of looking carefully at what we had and where we were going. We realized that we needed to communicate with some other people who were doing similar things. We were frustrated by the fact that we felt we had an imperfect tool and we were quite sure that other people must have much more perfect ones, so we started trying to communicate with people using the computer in nutrition around the country. By some chance we encountered Donough O'Brien who had been appointed by the Academy of Pediatrics to a committee that was supposed to look into trying to develop better computer applications in nutrition for pediatric applications. The two of us together decided that we should have a meeting in Seattle. It happened to be in April and subsequent meetings have been in April ever since.

The Seattle meeting gathered 45 or 46 people together including the representatives from USDA and Dr. Rizek. We began with a somewhat simplistic idea of where we were going and what we wanted to do. Our original purposes were very much focused on the problems of all who were applying computing to nutrition - the data bases were really very incomplete and quite difficult to use. In the process of meeting we developed a much more complex idea about having an organization that would communicate about nutrition and computer applications and would share between members some of the programming techniques and some of the problems that all of us were encountering. My ideas, I suppose, were representative of at least the dietitians in the group. I don't know how representative they were of the others, but I want to mention them to you because they show the flow of direction at the time.

First, I wanted to complain about data bases, then I began to see that we needed to be much more specific in our needs in nutrition applications. We recognized that there was obviously a strong need for an international cooperation. We needed an international data base that has comparable data collections that will allow studies done in Cleveland or studies done in Seattle or studies done in Utah or Washington to be comparable. We began to recognize, however, that there were some other problems that were really very important and one of them is something obvious

to all of you who worked in nutrition and that is that before you can use the data base you've got to come up with diet information from people and our diet history methodologies are rudimentary. We have done some sharing of information about how we gathered our dietary history and we need to have more information and more sharing about coding procedures as well.

Certainly in the last few years, we've begun to recognize that there is a great deal of danger in computer applications and nutrition and that the interpretation of results can be very very important. We have a very powerful tool and perhaps people who are closely aligned with computers get swallowed up and forget how powerful it is. Each year we should remind ourselves that this is indeed a tool that can be used badly as well as used well.

I think we need to deal with questions about programs and data bases - How do you share these things, how do you pay for them? How do you protect the rights of the author and the rights of ownership? How do you make sure that the programs you have are used in an appropriate way? I think we strongly feel the need to assure ourselves that the people who develop programs have the right to direct the way that they are used so that they are not misused and I don't have to remind any of you that nutrition not only is a volatile subject but that it is open to be gathered up and taken in by professionals and non-professionals alike and it can be applied poorly as well as well and it is possibly very dangerous. We are sometimes turning over a very powerful tool to people who do not have the right to use that tool. Ideas and thoughts about what we were doing as a group began to evolve and they started basically in that first program. Suddenly your simplistic ideas became not very simplistic. I began to focus each year on a group of objectives for an organization and each year my objectives changed and by last year I had really quite a complex group of objectives. This year I feel much less complex about objectives. I am all the way back to the original idea - what we really need to do is to produce a common set of conventions about nutrition data bases and to define the way they should be used. I realize that what we really need to do is to say to ourselves what are our priorities and what can we do realistically within a reasonable period of time. Where are our really high point needs and who are the greatest number of people who are going to use data so that we can define nutrition data needs and the highest user group.

We need to be much more specific. We also need to look at our own applications to be very aware of the fact that other people cannot make us come up with reasonable coding procedures, cannot assure our accuracy, cannot force us to use these tools in an appropriate manner and that we in the field of nutrition and dietetics and in medicine who are using these programs need to gather a group of conventions among ourselves and not push this off onto other people. I have come to this complete evolution from thinking what we needed here was a very grandiose

organization that needed to do 10 thousands fantastic things and I've gotten back to what we need is an organization that concentrates very much on nutrition data and how to use it.

This basically is our review of the original ideas and the history of our developing ideas about what we're doing here today.