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FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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FAO CONSIDERS MALNUTRITION DISEASES; CHOLESTEROL AILMENTS ON AGENDA

The term "protein malnutrition" was pin-pointed Thursday when the International Conference on Fish in Nutrition, in discussing the contribution of fish to national diets, gave attention to the protein deficiency diseases of children, especially kwashiorkor or marasmus, referred to as the most common and most malignant result of all nutritional deficiencies.

The conference which is being held in Washington is sponsored by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. The aim of the conference is to review the place of fishery products in the diet of the well nourished who have high living standards as well as its place in the diet of the undernourished, and to ascertain how fish can contribute to a greater extent to human welfare by increased use. The general field of fish and fishery products in the relationship to the lowering of the cholesterol levels in the blood stream is also on the agenda to be discussed with other phases of the contribution of fish to national diets.

Discussion of kwashiorkor was launched by a report prepared by Dr. Jean Mayer, Department of Nutrition, Harvard University. Dr. Mayer's report was vigorously supported by Jose Marie Bengoa of the World Health Organization who declared that tens of thousands of Latin American infants die needlessly each year directly or indirectly of malnutrition. "For one baby who dies in the United States because of malnutrition 300 die in Latin America", he said.

The stage was set for the discussion of the plight of children in protein-deficient areas by K.K.P.N. Rao of the Food Consumption and Planning Branch, Nutrition Division, FAO, Rome, Italy, who stated that there was sufficient evidence to say that more than half of the world's population is either undernourished or

malnourished. He said that the countries facing critical food and nutritional situations are mostly in those regions declared to be developing or underdeveloped economically--Asia and the Far East, the Near East, Africa and Latin America.

In those areas, he said there are prevalent signs of nutritional deficiency such as protein malnutrition, beriberi, nutritional anemia, rickets, pellagra, goiter, and ariboflavinosis. He pointed out that the diets were satisfactory from the viewpoint of energy content--that is there were sufficient calories except in a few areas, but that the daily intake contained too much carbohydrate and too little protective food rich in protein and other nutrients. He urged increasing fish supplies in these areas to provide a more balanced diet.

The child disease, kwashiorkor, is widespread in the world as is evidenced by its many names, Dr. Mayer said. It is called malignant malnutrition in South Africa where untreated cases are so often lethal, fatty liver in India, Vietnamese swelling and numerous other designations. The disease usually begins at the time of weaning when the child has been put on a protein-deficient diet.

Some of the effects are retarded growth, edema, reduction in the quantity of hair and in the skin pigment, fatty infiltration of the liver, intestinal disorders, vascular fragility, and psychic changes which often show up as apathy. In untreated cases mortality is high, never less than 30 percent and in some areas as high as 100 percent.

The main treatment is dietary. In children three years old with good general condition a balanced diet containing milk and animal protein is given at the outset.

Prevention is based upon increasing the supply of animal protein in the diet, developing proper mixtures of vegetable protein, eliminating the "hunger months" during which the incidence of kwashiorkor increases, supplementary feeding programs for infants and growing children using a good protein which can be supplied by fish meal or fish flour, education of the young mother, correction of the conditions under which children suffer from plain neglect.

On Friday is a discussion relative to the effect of fish and fish oil on blood cholesterol, obesity and cardiovascular disorders. The importance of minor elements and the nutritive value of several specific species of fish is also to be discussed.

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