

3rd MEETING

10th December 2001, Conference Rm 149, Richmond House, London

MINUTES (III)

Acting Chairman Professor Peter Aggett

Members
Professor Annie Anderson
Professor John Cummings
Miss Gill Fine
Dr Timothy Key
Professor Peter Kopelman
Dr Ann Prentice
Professor Andrew Rugg-Gunn
Dr Anita Thomas
Mrs Stella Walsh
Dr Anthony Williams
Professor Christine Williams

Government Assessors
Ms Imogen Sharp (DH)
Mr Tom Murray (FSA)
Dr Martin Donaghy (Scottish Executive, Health Department)

Secretariat
Dr Sheela Reddy (DH)
Dr Lisa Jackson (FSA)
Dr Adrienne Cullum (DH)
Dr Alison Tedstone (FSA)
Mr Fayaz Aziz (DH)
Ms Orla Yeates (FSA)

Agenda Item 1: Chair's Introduction and apologies for absence

1. The Acting-Chair, Professor Peter Aggett welcomed members to the third meeting of the Scientific Advisory Committee on Nutrition, and a new staff member to the Secretariat, Dr Alison Tedstone of the Food Standards Agency (FSA).
2. The Chair reminded members to declare, when appropriate, any interests directly related to discussions at Committee meetings.
3. Apologies for absence were received from Professor Alan Jackson, Professor Sheila Bingham, Ms Paulette Jones, Dr Elizabeth Mitchell and Ms Ginny Blakey.

Agenda Item 2: Minutes of last meeting (27/09/01) - SACN /01/min 02

4. Members were invited to comment on the minutes of the previous meeting.

Matters arising from last meeting

5. The Committee agreed that in future minutes would be agreed by post. Any changes should be received by the secretariat within two days. The minutes should be completed and posted on the website within one month of the meeting in line with the spirit of openness and transparency.
6. Members were informed that a Subgroup on salt will meet on 25 January 2002. The meeting is to be chaired by Professor Alan Jackson and will include SACN members: Professor Peter Aggett, Professor Sheila Bingham and Ms Gill Fine.

Agenda Item 3: A systematic approach to the evaluation of evidence that relates food and nutrients to health - SACN/01/12

7. The Chair thanked the Subgroup on Risk Assessment for producing a very useful document. The Subgroup was chaired by Professor John Cummings and attended by Professor Christine Williams and Dr Tim Key from SACN, and Dr Peter Bennett from the Economics and Operational Research Division of the Department of Health. Representatives of DH and FSA secretariat were also present.
8. The Chair of the Subgroup, Professor Cummings, provided a brief outline of the proceedings of their meeting on 12th November 2001. He stated that the Subgroup focused on evidence relating to both risks and benefits and that the current draft paper on risk assessment was open for comment. .
9. The Committee was informed that the Food Standards Agency and the Health Departments are responsible for determining the appropriate risk management and risk communication procedures for a particular health issue. The importance of evaluating evidence to inform public health policy was re-iterated.
10. Members were invited to comment on the draft paper.
11. Members asked whether establishing 'causality' (as outlined in paragraph 7) was realistic, and suggested that the term be replaced by 'degree of certainty'. The Chair of the Subgroup pointed out that paragraph 7 referred to a point of principle and that a range of study types needed to be examined before causality can be established.
12. The Committee agreed that the proposed structure was useful and suggested that it could be modified to allow the assessment of data from studies where intermediate stages of a disease process are used as the outcome measure (and extrapolations made), as opposed to the actual disease state.
13. It was suggested that randomised controlled trials be categorised as a separate study type to epidemiological studies as the latter are essentially observational rather than experimental.
14. It was brought to members' attention that Annex 1 provided an example of a system to score the design of studies which was used by the COMA committee on Diet and Cancer to assess evidence. Members agreed that the use of a numeric system could result in focus on studies that achieve high scores based on their design and inadvertently overlook valuable evidence provided by other studies that are less robust in design.. Some members suggested that a scoring system could be applied in the first instance to help categorise and assess evidence.
15. It was recommended that a system be developed whereby the evidence is presented in a systematic and transparent way that allows judgements to be made on both the quantitative and qualitative aspects of the studies included.
16. The Chair advised the Committee that there was also a need to include a standard process for assessing nutritional aspects of novel and functional foods and products when requested.
17. The Committee discussed the availability of national data -(such as the National Diet and Nutrition Surveys) for monitoring the consumption of novel foods. It was noted that retailers hold a wealth of data

through loyalty and club cards. However, previous discussions by COMA and ACNFP had highlighted limitations in the use of these data, and a number of concerns about confidentiality. Further evaluation is required to assess its feasibility and validity in monitoring the consumption of foods whether they be novel or not.

18. It was highlighted that there are several publications that may be useful for identifying approaches that could be adopted for assessing the nutritional effects of foods. These include the COMA report *Guidelines on the Nutritional Assessment of Infant Formulas*, the Advisory Committee on Novel Food and Processes document *Guidelines on the Assessment of Novel Foods and Processes* and the Report of the Panel on Novel Foods of the Committee on Medical Aspects of Food Policy document *The Nutritional Assessment of Novel Foods and Processes*. **The Secretariat agreed to provide copies of these documents to Committee members for information.**
19. **Members agreed that the sub-group should aim to develop principles of assessment that are robust, clear and consistent in approach, but are flexible enough to suit particular cases. It was agreed the Subgroup would meet again early in the New Year and that a revised paper will be provided for SACN's next meeting.**

Agenda Item 4: Working Group on Iron SACN/01/13

20. Members were informed that Dr Ann Prentice had been nominated as the Vice-chair of the Working Group on Iron. Dr Prentice had accepted this nomination. A shortlist of members for the Working Group had been drawn up by the secretariat in consultation with the Chair of SACN (Professor Jackson) and the Chair of the Working Group on Iron (Professor Aggett). With the exception of one nominee, all those approached had accepted the offer.
21. Members were asked to agree the outline of the Working Group on Iron and to comment on the expertise of the suggested group.
22. It was noted that the composition of the nominated Working Group does not include a member with particular expertise or awareness of the broad social and ethical dimensions as outlined in the paragraph 4. Members were informed that *Ad hoc* experts could be recruited into the group as and when required.
23. The Chair informed members that they will receive regular updates at SACN meetings on the workings and progress of the group and there will be regular opportunities for their input.
24. The proposed timetable of the Working Group was outlined to members. The aim will be to have an initial meeting of the working group early in 2002, produce a draft report by the start of 2003 and produce a final report by the end of 2003.
25. **Members agreed the membership of the Working Group on Iron.**

Agenda Item 5: Maternal and Infant Nutrition - SACN/01/14

26. Committee members agreed to the setting up of a Working Group on Maternal and Child Nutrition.
27. **The following Terms of Reference were agreed for the Working Group:**
 - i. To review the evidence on the influence of maternal, fetal and child nutrition including growth and development in utero and early childhood on the development of disease later in life.*
 - ii. To identify opportunities for nutritional intervention that could influence the risk of disease later in life*
 - iii. To consider such scientific aspects of nutrition of women of reproductive age, infants and children as are referred to it by the Scientific Advisory Committee on Nutrition (SACN), Health Departments or the Food Standards Agency.*
28. Members recommended that it focus initially on maternal nutrition, and child nutrition from infancy to early childhood (i.e. up to 5 years of age). It was agreed that a phased approach be adopted whereby issues relating to children aged 5 years through to adolescence could be reviewed at a later stage.

29. Members made suggestions on the type and range of expertise required for such a Working Group to address all the responsibilities arising from the terms of reference, but that additional expertise would be needed to address issues in the first two terms. It was agreed that the Chair of the Working Group and the secretariat would propose to the SACN a proposed competency list and membership for the Working Group on Child and Maternal Nutrition.
30. **Dr Anthony Williams was proposed and seconded for the Chair of the Working Group on Maternal and Child Nutrition, and he accepted.**

Agenda Item 6: Minutes of the "Quick Think" on obesity SACN/01/15

31. Some of the key issues that had been raised at the "Quick Think" on obesity, held immediately after the last SACN meeting were highlighted. The Chair suggested that a Working Group on Obesity be set up to address these issues. A report could help clarify the population at risk, provide an impetus for policy and highlight neglected research issues.
32. Members were then invited to comment on the minutes of the "Quick Think" and endorse the setting up of a Working Group to address the issue.
33. Some members raised concerns about overlapping or repeating work being undertaken by other groups. Members were informed that the Health Development Agency (HDA) is in the process of synthesising evidence from systematic reviews and meta-analyses of interventions on the prevention of obesity, to which SACN members can contribute.
34. **The Committee endorsed the setting up of a Working Group on Obesity when resources permit, following the establishment of the Working Group on Iron, and The Working Group on Maternal and Child Nutrition.**

Agenda Item 7: COT reports: Caffeine Intake in Pregnancy and Dioxins in Foods SACN/01/16

35. Committee members were invited to comment on and endorse two reports by the Committee on Toxicity (COT) on the Reproductive Effects of Caffeine, and Dioxins in Foods, particularly referring to its implications for breastfeeding and the COMA recommendation on the consumption of oily fish. The COT report reiterated COMA advice on breastfeeding and the health benefits associated with regular consumption of oily fish
36. Members agreed the evidence to support the health benefits of fish consumption, related particularly to secondary prevention coronary heart disease (CHD), but the level of intake required is not usually achieved in the UK.
37. Members highlighted that it was not possible to determine the risk of exposure to dioxins from the consumption of oily fish due to a lack of evidence, particularly for consumers with high consumption.
38. The Chair suggested that the secretariats of the FSA and DOH Committees should collaborate during the finalisation of statements such as these, so that SACN is made aware of any likely nutritional implications.
39. **Members endorsed the recommendations on breastfeeding and the intake of oily fish in the Committee on Toxicity (COT) Reports, *The Reproductive Effects of Caffeine*, and *Dioxins in Foods*.**

Agenda Item 8: Update from Department of Health (England) SACN/01/17

40. The Committee was updated on current nutrition related activities undertaken by the Department of Health.
41. Members were informed that a 'health case' is to be proposed for physical activity and that an advisory group will be established to address this topic. It is envisaged that a SACN Committee member will be included in this advisory group. Interested members were asked to contact the secretariat to declare their willingness to serve on this group.
42. It was brought to members' attention that the Chief Medical Officer (CMO) had published his Annual Report (www.doh.gov.uk/cmo/). The report highlighted five priority areas for action, including hypertension. The

report endorsed the COMA recommendation for a gradual reduction in population average sodium intake by the adult population, such that mean intakes of salt should be reduced from 9g to 6g per day.

43. Members queried whether patterns of infant feeding are to be monitored in the National Service Framework for Children. It was noted that there is a discrepancy between the data collected in Scotland (available at postcode level) and the data collected in England and Wales, which is currently less detailed. Members were informed that monitoring at local level is being considered in England in the context of the health inequalities review.
44. Members sought clarification as to the scope and composition of the new Nutrition Forum in England, and its distinction from the Nutrition Forum in Scotland. The Committee was informed that the Nutrition Forum in Scotland deals with state agencies and local authorities whereas the Nutrition Forum in England would be more wide ranging, involving UK country representatives, other Government Departments and consumer organisations. The Nutrition Forum in England will facilitate communication and sharing of information between different stakeholders. It was noted that the Nutrition Forum in England does not currently include representation from the dental profession.
45. **It was agreed that a Committee member would represent SACN on the Nutrition Forum. Professor Annie Anderson was nominated and accepted the nomination.**

Agenda Item 9: Update from the Scottish Executive SACN/01/18

46. The Committee was updated on current nutrition related activities undertaken by the Scottish Executive and invited to comment.
47. Members asked whether there was any intention in Scotland to implement an obesity review, or schemes similar to the National School Fruit Scheme or the Five-a-Day Programme. Members were informed that there is a willingness to undertake such activities but as resources are limited, only activities in the priority areas outlined are currently being undertaken. However, the Executive plans to monitor developments and learn from the outcomes of such programmes in England.

Agenda Item 10: Update from FSA-SACN/01/19

48. The Committee was given an update on the Food Standards Agency's nutrition research programmes and invited to comment. Members were also invited to attend two workshops planned for next year.
49. Members were informed that the Antioxidants in Foods (NO4) programme was currently under review, a new research programme on colonic health has started, a low income dietary survey is planned and other information about the FSA's work is to be placed on the new FSA website.

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50. The Committee was asked to note and comment on a recent *British Medical Journal (BMJ)* article (BMJ 2001;323:1198-1199), which attempted to substantiate the need for a controlled trial prior to adopting a national strategy of fortification of flour with folic acid. The Committee agreed that the article was misleading in relation to the COMA's conclusions on this matter. A "rapid response" had been sent to the *BMJ* by Dr Anthony Williams and Professor Alan Jackson clarifying the position adopted by COMA.
51. Members were updated on work following the consultation on folic acid. The Consultation was a joint exercise between the UK Health Departments and the FSA. Members were informed that the complexity of the analysis and the need for the additional work (particularly on the prevalence of Vitamin B12 deficiency among older adults) was taking longer than expected. The additional work, that was required, has now been completed and the FSA are preparing a paper on the matter for their February 2002 Board meeting. Health Ministers will consider options for action, taking into account any advice from the Health Departments and the FSA.
52. Members were asked to note and comment on a response by the secretariat in consultation with the Chair, Professor Alan Jackson, to a letter from the British Egg Information Service requesting that SACN consider

and update past government advice in relation to dietary cholesterol, egg intake and cardiovascular disease. Members agreed that the reply was satisfactory.

53. It was agreed that the minutes of this meeting be agreed by correspondence. Members were reminded that the secretariat is aiming to post the minutes of all meetings on the SACN website within one month of the meeting.
54. The dates for the fourth, fifth and sixth meetings were confirmed as the 27th March, 20th June and 3rd October 2002, respectively. The fifth meeting will be an open meeting.