I would like to give a brief summary of where we are and where we are going at the National Cancer Institute in our program on nutrition and cancer.

The role of diet is gaining prominence in investigations into why some people get cancer and others do not. It has been said that perhaps one-half of all female cancer deaths and perhaps up to 30% of the male cancer deaths may be related to nutritional factors. The term “nutritional factors” refers to deficiencies and excesses in the regular diet and does not include so-called food additives.

The typical American diet may be responsible for the rising incidence of cancer of the colon and has also been linked with cancer of the kidney and of the pancreas. People with high-carbohydrate diets have a very low incidence of cancer of the colon. However, with the typical American high-fat-high-protein diet, carcinoma of the colon becomes a more frequent phenomenon. Studies showing statistical relationships between cancer and specific diets, as has been pointed out by many of the papers presented at this conference, involved Seventh-Day Adventists, native and immigrant Japanese, African and American Blacks, and others.

With regard to the program on cancer and nutrition at the National Cancer Institute, Section 407-B of the National Cancer Act of 1971 as amended enjoins the director of the National Cancer Institute to “collect, analyze and disseminate information respecting nutrition programs for cancer patients and the relationship between nutrition and cancer.” In the Congressional Report of 1974, the interpretation of this amendment states that “it is intended that this amendment allow the program to explore both the role of appropriate nutrition in the treatment and rehabilitation of people with cancer, and the role of nutrition in causing cancer.” Clearly, a mandate exists for developing a program to ascertain the effects of nutrition on the cause of cancer.

Until very recently, no formal program on diet, nutrition, and cancer existed within the National Cancer Institute. Related programs previously undertaken include the large bowel task force and an organ site program in the Division of Cancer Research, Resources and Centers.

In the Division of Cancer Cause and Prevention, there are a number of projects designed to identify groups or individual members of certain groups who may be at excess risk with regard to various alimentary tract cancers. Such studies should provide clues leading to the identification of risk factors and should include specific items of dietary intake. There are also many projects designed to determine the carcinogenicity of specific agents, many of which are factors in nutrition, such as food additives and natural products.

In addition, there are related programs that are being developed under the mandate of the National Cancer Act, which concerns nutritional status as it relates to the response to therapy, during remission and rehabilitation of the cancer patient.

These programs are and will continue to be supported by the Division of Cancer Research, Resources and Centers, the Grants Program, and the Cancer Control Program.

The new program in diet, nutrition, and cancer is organized as an institute-wide program at the National Cancer Institute and is located administratively within the Division of Cancer Cause and Prevention. It is under the direction and leadership of the Deputy Director of the Division, Dr. Gio Gori. Dr. Gori has organized an excellent program and has assembled a very able and prominent advisory group.

This research will be supported through several of the operating divisions of the Institute, which are fund through both the contract and the new Cancer Research Emphasis Grant mechanism.

It is expected that the diet, nutrition, and cancer program will be supported at a level of some 4 to 6 million dollars during the first year, and certainly the recommendations made and the ideas expressed at this meeting will contribute much to the development of this program on a national basis.
National Cancer Institute Program on Nutrition and Cancer

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Cancer Res 1975;35:3544.

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