

ANNOTATIONS

NUTRITIONAL DEFICIENCIES¹

DR. YOUMANS has written a book which should prove valuable to the medical practitioner desirous of obtaining practical information on the prevention, diagnosis, and treatment of nutritional deficiency diseases. He has adhered to a style "made familiar by the usual text-books of medicine." In most instances this has proven successful in providing a logical breakdown of the subject matter. The chapters on vitamins A, D, and ascorbic acid are particularly good.

A less strict adherence to a text-book style of writing might have increased the book's readability and practical value by decreasing its length through the avoidance of repetitious statements. The chapter on vitamin E, which is nine pages in length, might have been, advantageously, greatly condensed. The editing has not been carefully done. Too many sentences are complicated; others are difficult to decipher. For example, on page 92, we have: "In acute cases a toxic delirium characterizes the mental changes in the more chronic types of apathy, loss of memory, depression, and disorientation."

Much of the introductory chapter might easily have been dispensed with, devoted as it is to deprecation of multi-vitamin therapy, not readily reconciled with the author's belief in undoubted interrelationships among the vitamins (page 6); the importance and prevalence of those mild deficiency states which are so extremely difficult to diagnose (page 7); the characteristic multiple nature of nutritional deficiencies in humans (page 9); and his recommendation of "concentrates of food or food-like substances" (page 12). We have no argument with Dr. Youmans in his assertion that natural foodstuffs are to be preferred, provided that foods of sufficient quantity and quality can be obtained. However, we cannot agree that the use of combinations of vitamins is in general to be con-

¹Youmans, John B.: *NUTRITIONAL DEFICIENCIES*. Philadelphia, J. B. Lippincott Company, 1941, 398 pp. \$5.00.

demned. We believe that many occasions arise in the practice of medicine in which such preparations are useful and often provide the only means of insuring a more or less adequate supply of these substances for the patient.

We find it necessary also to take exception to the author's apparent interpretation of the terms "mild," "latent," "subclinical," and "hypovitaminosis," as synonymous. The item "hypovitaminosis" includes all degrees of vitamin deficiency below optimal nutrition and above complete avitaminosis, the latter being a most uncommon finding in man. "Mild" is a clinical term and includes all degrees of deficiency less than those which the clinician considers dangerous to the patient's health or life. The term "subclinical" signifies a state of suboptimal health which cannot be diagnosed by methods generally regarded as clinical. Conditions which are latent are asymptomatic.

The author uses the expression "safe minimum" daily intake. We believe that the only "safe minimum" is the optimum daily intake. Dr. Youmans probably would not agree as, for example, he recommends 3,000-4,000 I.U. of vitamin A as a safe minimum daily intake for adults, whereas the recommended daily allowance of the Food and Nutrition Committee, of the National Research Council, is 5,000 I.U.

The book contains an extremely interesting chapter on protein deficiency. Dr. Youmans makes two statements here which are quite provocative. Unfortunately, he fails to provide any very convincing evidence for their substantiation. The first of these is that relative deficiencies of protein are more frequent than deficiencies of the vitamins, and the second maintains that there is reason to believe that protein deficiency is one of the best single measures of general nutrition. A good measure of general nutrition is one which reveals early nutritional failure. Dr. Youmans has not shown that malnutrition in respect to protein (relative or absolute) can be detected reasonably early in the course of nutritional failure; in fact, the contrary appears to be true.

We believe Dr. Youmans' book to be a good one and that it fills a definite need. The criticisms which we have expressed are based on our belief that this book should have a wide distribution among general practitioners who might come to depend upon it as their Bible on nutritional deficiencies. Subsequent editions, therefore, should be, and undoubtedly will be, carefully edited and revised.

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