

News and Views From the Director

Many continue to ask whether there is Division policy about the foods we serve at Division functions and other practices concerned with our lunch rooms. Some ask why there should be any policy applied to staff, who have no direct relationship to the public health policies that Division faculty advocate or represent, locally, nationally or internationally.

We have seen no reason to be "oppressive" in this regard but we are, nevertheless, as a Division and public institution, representative of Public Health and of healthy living practices. We were the first to have a smoke-free environment on the University campus. Nobody protested that on the basis of individual rights, probably because everyone understood that it would be highly inappropriate to take money for and pursue research on the health effects of smoking, or to participate actively in testimony before congress, or to do research on vending machines in the community, and so forth, and not to observe practices consistent with those policies at our home base.

Similarly, and perhaps more so, this Division and the Laboratory of Physiological Hygiene have been leaders for 50 years in the study of diet and health. We similarly take large amounts of government money to study dietary strategies and the effects of dietary change and dissemination of eating pattern education in communities. These have given us all jobs and (exciting?) careers.

Similarly our faculty and Division stand at the center of national policy by participation in the Surgeon General's Reports on Diet and Smoking, the National Academy of Sciences Report on Diet, American Heart Association Reports, the National Cholesterol Education Program, the National High Blood Pressure Education Program and in various other local and international bodies. Would it not be incongruous if we served at Division functions or parties anything other than the more attractive examples of the healthy eating pattern we do research about? What if, instead of fruits, vegetables and grains in the pictures on our Gate 20 walls we had egg yolks, Hagen Daz and prime beef? I'm sure you get the picture, and am sure would not want us to be inconsistent.

Similarly, if we had a brightly flashing Coca-Cola vending machine in our eating areas and Half-and-Half creamer for our coffee areas, would not the public messages and effect be the same?

We are all free to pursue healthy or less healthy personal lifestyles, eat as we please, in our personal lunches, and live as we please in our private lives. If those private lives are inconsistent with our public lives, that's our individual problem. But if our public lives are inconsistent with our public policy, posture and example, then would we not be institutionally irresponsible?

I hope this is not excessive moralism. I don't think it is an abrogation of individual rights. It is an obvious institutional public obligation. Over the years I have been grateful for everyone's understanding of our need to be consistent in our public lives, and I appreciate your continued support for that. Occasionally these valid questions will re-arise. I am happy to address them and of course, you may want to requestion the new Division Head, when she or he arrives!

