Reply to AS Truswell

Dear Sir:

We are grateful to Truswell for his instructive comments. We agree that cachexia and wasting have been used in various connotations and denotations for many years. In fact, that was the impetus for our small suggestion. However, we differ with Truswell in our understanding of the current usage of wasting. It is certainly true that this term has been used to describe atrophy of a part of the body, such as a limb after polio. However, more recently this usage has been overwhelmed by the sense of undesirable loss of weight that is implicit in the term AIDS wasting. In fact, the AIDS epidemic has largely been responsible for the replacement of this meaning of cachexia by wasting. We therefore sought to retain the elegant term cachexia (from the Greek for what is politely termed poor condition) in what is biologically its most important meaning: the loss of lean body mass (or body cell mass, depending on the measurement technique), which is thought to be directly responsible for the poor condition and reduced functional capacity that occurs with cachexia.

Although it is true that the nutrition community is but a small part of the medical research and practice establishment, we do not despair of slowly educating our colleagues. If we do not clarify our nomenclature among ourselves, we shall never educate our peers. We hope this effort at rationalizing nomenclature will help in this regard, as a common language is essential. Even if our suggestion is not accepted, we believe it is useful to stimulate the kind of debate that may lead to consensus and progress in the future.


REFERENCES


Reply to SJ Fairweather-Tait

Dear Sir:

Fairweather-Tait, in a recent paper from her laboratory (1), questioned whether moderate zinc deficiency occurs frequently in type 2 diabetic subjects. A paper from my laboratory had contended that moderate zinc deficiency may be common among type 2 diabetic women (2).

The study by Fairweather-Tait’s group (1) deserves attention. Our recent paper did not provide this attention simply because their work...