# Trace Element Metabolism in Man and Animals

Edited by

J. M. Gawthorne, J. McC. Howell, C. L. White

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Proceedings of the Fourth International Symposium on Trace Element Metabolism in Man and Animals (TEMA-4), held in Perth, Western Australia 11–15 May 1981

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## PREFACE

The Fourth International Symposium on Trace Element Metabolism in Man and Animals (TEMA-4), was held in the Sheraton Hotel, Perth, Western Australia from May 11 to 15, 1981. One of the aims of TEMA-1, which was held in Aberdeen in 1969, had been to promote a meeting at which involved scientists from a variety of disciplines would be given the opportunity to present and discuss recent research findings. It was our intention to maintain this aim. We also intended to continue the initiative taken at TEMA-3, held in Freising-Weihenstephan in 1977, which was to encourage participation by our colleagues in human medicine. We feel that a pleasing degree of success was achieved for both these aims.

The decision to hold TEMA-4 in Perth was made at the TEMA-3 meeting in 1977. The International Guiding Committee wished to acknowledge the significant body of work on trace element metabolism and disorders that had been undertaken in Australia. But in particular they wished to pay tribute to Professor Eric Underwood who for so long had been guide and mentor to so many scientists working on problems associated with trace elements. Eric was the obvious choice as Chairman of the Local Organising Committee and he set about his task with his usual vigour and good humour. We were all shocked and saddened by his death in August 1980. We feel sure that the decision to continue with arrangements for the TEMA-4 meeting is what he would have wished us to do. The members of the Local Organising Committee hope that in some measure the meeting and the Proceedings of the Fourth International Symposium on Trace Element Metabolism in Man and Animals will serve as a memorial to the work of this unique and most gifted man of science.

The Symposium was attended by 210 scientists from 24 countries, which was a most gratifying response in view of the ever increasing cost of travel. We chose six speakers for our plenary sessions and invited active workers in the field of trace element studies to submit abstracts. One hundred and forty seven contributions were presented verbally and a further twenty three were presented as posters. A wide variety of topics were covered and we were particularly pleased to have presentations and active discussions in such areas as the effect of trace elements on the development of the central nervous system and the role of trace elements in human disease. Many new ideas were presented and considerable interest centred around the series of papers given on aspects of zinc metabolism and on the role of metallothioneins.

To assist the rapid publication and to minimise the cost of the Proceedings we chose to use an offset litho process and a 'camera ready' system was used for manuscript preparation. The importance of the discussion of the contributions was recognised. We chose to record the discussions which were then typed so that they were available for correction during the meeting. In order to minimise the delay between the meeting and the publication of the Proceedings the manuscripts and discussions were lightly edited and a minimum number of changes were made. This has involved some retyping and the editors accept responsibility for the changes that may have occurred at this stage.

We wish to thank all participants and session chairpersons for their valuable contributions to the meeting. We are grateful to the Secretariat who have worked with such dedication on the manuscripts and discussion of the papers. We acknowledge the financial support of our sponsors, without their aid the Symposium could not have taken place. We are grateful to the members of the International Guiding Committee and the Local Organising Committee who worked hard and long for the success of the meeting.

- J. McC. Howell
- J. M. Gawthorne
- C. L. White

Perth 1981

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# INTRODUCTORY LECTURE

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### ERIC JOHN UNDERWOOD, FRS; A COLLEAGUE, MENTOR & FRIEND

C. F. Mills, Rowett Research Institute, ABERDEEN, SCOTLAND.

My Lord Mayor, Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen;

On behalf of all my fellow participants, I would first like to express gratitude to the City of Perth for all it has already done to provide us with such a congenial environment within which to hold our meetings during the next 5 days. Experience of past International Symposia on Trace Element Metabolism in Man and Animals held in Aberdeen, Madison and Munich has taught many of us to expect that we are now at the start of a stimulating and challenging if exhausting week of discussions. The success of these past meetings was due in no small measure to the kindness and hospitality extended to us that helped to maintain the informal atmosphere so essential for frank but constructive discussion of our problems. The generous welcome given to us by you, my Lord Mayor, and the kindness already shown by members of the Local Organising Committee and their families leaves us in no doubt that this is going to be an equally successful meeting.

In all our minds at this moment are thoughts of the man who should have been delivering this Opening Address. The decision to hold this meeting in Perth, Western Australia, reflected not only our wish to acknowledge the contribution made by Australiasian Scientists to the topic that is of such interest to us but also to acknowledge the unique contributions of our late colleague, Professor Eric Underwood. In the interval between the idea and the event, we have lost from our company a man who in his lifetime did more than any other to emphasise to the world at large and to the scientific community in particular, the influence of essential and toxic trace element supply upon the health of man and his animals. For this reason, my pleasure at being invited to open the affairs of this meeting is tempered by the sadness we will all share throughout the week at the absence of the man who so often has guided our thoughts and activities.

Traditionally, the opening papers of past TEMA Symposia have taken the form of general reviews of recent progress. On this occasion my objectives will differ. Instead, before we embark upon this 4th Meeting, it is more appropriate we should pause to reflect upon some of the objectives and attitudes that led Eric Underwood to make such outstanding contributions in the field of trace element research and to consider how this approach, so successful in his hands, might continue to influence the effectiveness of our own future efforts.

### TRACE ELEMENT RESEARCH AND ITS PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

When in the year 1920, the Underwood family moved to a 2,000 acre holding in the vicinity of Perth, Eric, then 15 years old, first became familiar with the difficulties faced by those Western Australians attempting to develop livestock farming in what at the time was a particularly hostile natural environment. This experience and, later, the emergence of evidence that the low productivity of the area might be partly attributable to mineral deficiencies, coloured almost all of his subsequent attitudes on the relationship between the practice and the science of agriculture. It was this background that led him as a young graduate to investigate variables influencing inorganic nutrient supply and pasture productivity in work for a Doctorate at the University of Cambridge and later, after his appointment as Animal Nutritionist working for the Department of Agriculture, Western Australia, led him to join Filmer in his studies of nutritional aspects of the aetiology of wasting diseases of cattle and sheep endemic in this and many other areas of Australasia.

The remit given to this 26 year old appointee would have daunted many. It was virtually to explain why earlier studies yielded many conflicting observations on the effectiveness of iron preparations in controlling such diseases and then to recommend more effective prophylactic measures. Although the subsequent history of the painstaking

studies leading to the finding that cobalt was the biologically effective adventitious contaminant has often been documented, such accounts usually ignore the most important personal attributes of the worker primarily responsible for this discovery. These were the clarity of his appreciation that a successful outcome to the investigation could have important practical implications and the courage of his conviction that the approach selected, although physically and at that time technically demanding, was appropriate. The road to ultimate success was hindered by problems with which some of us are once again beginning to become familiar - shortage of funds and of equipment and conflicting advice with respect to appropriate priorities for state-financed research. That so much was achieved in establishing the essentiality of cobalt for ruminants under such circumstances is its own testimony to the enthusiasm and tenacity of purpose of the man whose work paved the way for the discoveries of others that brought him equal satisfaction and pleasure - the education of the role of cobalt in cobalamin (Vitamin B<sub>12</sub>) and later, identification of the biochemical defects responsible for the clinical manifestations of the disease that first excited his interest in the trace elements.

Even this brief account is sufficient to indicate the reasons why Eric Underwood's interests in the topic of the role and metabolism of the trace elements, although based upon a wide experience of their significance for health, also extended to detailed aspects of their biochemical and metabolic role in Nature. Those of his friends with a similar outlook were often made particularly aware of his intense interest in such fundamental studies. On meeting such colleagues, even after a long interval, he would often forego many of the conventional trivia of greeting and rush directly into the topic most exciting him at the time - "Hello (very briefly!) - what did you think of that excellent piece of work on ...". His remarks on studies for which he felt less respect were equally direct and, usually, much more succinct. The voracity with which he assimilated such newly published information never diminished. It clearly reflected his conviction that progress towards the more effective diagnosis and control of practical problems would be determined largely by the extent to which studies of those biochemical and physiological processes most sensitive to trace element deficiency or excess could be encouraged and granted adequate financial support.

# SCIENTIFIC INTEGRITY AND RESPONSIBILITY

To some, the role of the trace elements in health and disease is a highly emotive subject. Although, in the context of animal health, their practical significance has been established clearly and repeatedly, much less is yet known of the influence of trace element deficiency or excess upon the health of man. Indeed, many of us have become familiar with the particular difficulty of maintaining a dispassionate appraisal of the claims sometimes made that abnormalities in trace element supply or metabolism play a primary role in the aetiology of many of man's most serious diseases or that increasing pollution of man's environment must inevitably have an adverse influence upon his health. Sometimes obscured by the dust created by the often heated discussion of extravagent claims and counter-claims lies the slowly growing body of evidence that, in some circumstances, often not fully defined, anomalies in trace element supply do indeed influence the health, development or well being of man. That, despite the vagaries of popular opinion, financial support for the conduct of trace element investigations relevant to human health has been growing steadily is largely due to the fact that we have had as one of our colleagues a man with a widely acknowledged reputation as a dispassionate arbiter of progress with a gift for distilling the essentials in his writings on the subject of the trace elements. The task of maintaining such an authorative commentary was enormous, particularly in recent years as progress accelerated rapidly. The achievement was recognised widely. Eric Underwood's writings ultimately influenced not only aspects of the policies of national and international agencies concerned with nutrition and health but also the effectiveness with which many of us, approaching the subject for the first time, were able first to establish familiarity with the subject and, later, to develop lines of communication with other workers sharing similar interests.

I have often heard it asked what led Eric Underwood to undertake this challenging commitment. I have no doubts whatsoever. It was that he shared with many others the satisfaction and sheer pleasure to be gained from intellectually challenging scientific effort in a field in which the outcome, directly or indirectly, will influence man's ability to control nutritional disease. No one appreciated better than he, the impact of trace element deficiency upon animal and human health in so many parts of the world. But