

# idea corner

## **Telenet— A How-To-Do-It Experience**

Shrinking travel budgets coupled with high costs of traveling are forcing Extension professionals to look to other means of holding informational programs. Couple this with the need for in-service training that dietitians and others, including para-professionals, have to take to maintain their certification, and you can appreciate the number of people in hospitals, school lunch programs, colleges, and universities in each state for whom this approach is applicable.

Some hospital personnel had attended one of Extension's food science face-to-face workshops in the past, enjoyed it, and decided to provide time on the network for us to teach a short course on sanitation for food-service workers. The "heart" of the network is set up 65 miles from the University of Georgia. However, one of the legs of the network was located in a hospital close to the university.

One hour of training was given on three consecutive weeks. The dates and time were planned three months in advance. The coordinator of the Georgia Hospital Telenet Program duplicated the slides and distributed them to the 40 locations throughout the state that indicated an interest in the training. The coordinator was also responsible for distributing handout materials to be used in the program.

A slide was made of the teaching specialist to introduce him to the students at the beginning of the presentations. Slides were divided into three packets for the three consecutive weeks of presentation. These included: first week, "What Are Bacteria, Yeasts, and Molds?"; second week, "Food, Hands, and Bacteria," "Personal Hygiene," and "Food Spoilage"; third week, "Food Borne Illnesses" and "Cleaning and Sanitizing." Each of the 40 locations was provided with a complete set of slides, handout materials, and petri dishes. Each of the locations had an individual who was responsible for operating the slide projector and acting as a monitor for the class.

The mechanics of the program were quite simple. We arrived at the hospital about 10 minutes before the program. The network was called up and reported to the coordinator who then introduced the specialist. As with any program, involvement of the audience is imperative. To obtain rapport with an audience you don't see is more difficult, but it can be done. Questions and answers become important. For instance, when the shape of bacterial cells were introduced, such as cocci, the audience was asked, "Repeat after me please, 'cocci.'" Each of the 40 locations pressed the bar and repeated "cocci." This gives the speaker assurance that his audience is, indeed, "with him."

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On "Food Spoilage," questions such as "What kinds of foods have you seen that were spoiled?" might be asked. The speaker must have patience to wait through some dead time. Questions were asked at the end of each of the programs and even some light-hearted joking resulted on one of the programs, indicating that rapport had been developed with the unseen audience.

Demonstrations were conducted by giving the students instructions such as "press your fingers gently but firmly against the agar in the petri dishes," or "press the dish containing the agar in Plate Number 2 against your hair." The monitors were responsible for collecting the dishes and incubating them. The following week, each individual had his/her own set of petri dishes available, and we talked about the bacterial growth on each of the dishes. The importance of washing hands and wearing hairnets was impressed on the students by the demonstration.

Evaluations at each of the sites indicated the program was well-received, so much so that the department was invited to use the facilities for a second program of the same nature about three months after the first one was completed. Another indication of the feedback was a request for the same program from a hospital network in the Midwest. The planning stages were essentially the same. This network was called 5 minutes before the program started, and we talked with people at 50 hospitals for 1 hour and 20 minutes.

A program like this is a challenge to the specialist to have program materials that are relevant, up-to-date, and interesting. Planning is the key to making a telenet program work for you.

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