

Arthur Schatzkin

Found that high fibre diets don't prevent colorectal cancer

In the 1990s the conventional wisdom among most doctors and the general public was that a diet low in fat and high in fibre would decrease the risk of colorectal cancer. The belief, though, was based mostly on a few small studies and educated conjecture, not on solid scientific evidence.

At the time, Arthur Gould Schatzkin, an epidemiologist at the National Cancer Institute (NCI) in Bethesda, Maryland, who was organising a major study on the topic, also suspected a link between intake of dietary fibre and colon cancer. But when the study was finally published in 2000 in the *New England Journal of Medicine*, generating headlines around the world, Schatzkin and his team concluded, "Adopting a diet that is low in fat and high in fiber, fruits, and vegetables does not influence the risk of recurrence of colorectal adenomas" (2000;342:1149-55).

Null results

Reflecting on that outcome a few years later, Schatzkin, who in 1999 was named chief of the nutritional epidemiology branch of the NCI's division of cancer epidemiology and genetics, told the *New York Times*, "We had high expectations and good rationale. We got absolutely null results" (www.nytimes.com, 27 Sep 2005, "Which of these foods will stop cancer? (not so fast)").

The ability to embrace unexpected, and, perhaps, non-desired scientific results, was one of Schatzkin's strengths as a nutrition and cancer researcher, says long time friend Elio Riboli, director of the school of public health

at Imperial College London, where Schatzkin was a popular part time visiting professor in nutritional epidemiology. "Arthur was an exceptional example of integrity in science," said Professor Riboli. "He was completely open minded and dedicated to finding and understanding the truth."



In the landmark study, Schatzkin assigned 2079 adults who recently had undergone surgery for removal of one or more colorectal adenomas, or benign tumors, into two groups. One group was put on a low fat diet that was high in fibre, fruit, and vegetables; the control group continued with their normal diet. Of the 1905 participants who completed the study four years later, 39.7% of the 958 members of the low fat, high fibre group had at least one recurrent adenoma, compared with 39.5% of the 947 members of the control group.

Although other studies since then have also concluded no link between dietary fibre and colorectal cancer, some studies have found evidence and the topic remains highly controversial. Schatzkin noted that his study focused on only the effect of fibre on preventing recurrence of polyps in patients, not whether fibre would hinder the polyps from eventually turning into cancerous tumours or would have helped prevent the first polyp from forming.

After the unexpected study results, Schatzkin became more tentative in offering dietary recommendations. Nonetheless, he felt doctors had a duty to counsel patients: "We have a responsibility to give the best advice we can while pointing out where the evidence is uncertain and how we're working to improve the science."

Professor Riboli said that improving the level of science used to better understand the role of nutrition in cancer aetiology and prevention was another key contribution from Schatzkin, adding, "He has made huge contributions in methodology."

In particular, Schatzkin focused on two major methodological weaknesses of nutritional

epidemiology, the first of which was improving the limited range of reported dietary intake in cohort studies. In the mid-1990s he conceived and launched a massive study that first involved sending

questionnaires to 3.5 million members of the AARP, formerly the American Association of Retired Persons and an advocacy group for older US residents. More than 500 000 people older than 50 returned questionnaires about diet, family history, exercise, and other information. The resultant database has led to at least 100 scientific papers and continues to be used by nutrition and cancer researchers worldwide.

Schatzkin's other methodological focus concerned measurement error associated with self reported dietary assessment. In a tacit acknowledgment of the possible shortcomings of relying on participants to record or recall their diets through questionnaires, he advocated developing more comprehensive and precise tools to accurately reflect food intake.

Nutritional epidemiology

Schatzkin was born on 11 February 1948 in New York City. He earned a bachelors degree in 1969 from Yale University and a medical degree in 1976 from the University of New York Downstate College of Medicine. He completed residency training in 1979 in internal medicine at Montefiore Hospital in New York and in preventive medicine in 1981 at Mount Sinai Medical Center in New York, and earned a masters and doctoral degrees from Columbia University school of public health in New York. He joined the NCI in 1984 as a senior staff fellow in the cancer prevention studies branch, becoming a senior investigator in 1988. In 1997 he joined the nutritional epidemiology branch.

Schatzkin learnt in January 2010 that he had brain cancer but continued to be involved in research planning, mentoring, and senior scientific discussions. He leaves his wife, Tamara Harris, chief of geriatric epidemiology at the National Institute on Aging, a son and a daughter.

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Arthur Schatzkin, epidemiologist (b 1948; q 1976, New York), died from brain cancer on 20 January 2011.

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Hazel Baker (née Hill)



Former consultant child psychiatrist Sutton Coldfield (b 1920; q Royal Free 1943), d 28 September 2010.

Awarded the dean's medal for clinical medicine, Hazel Baker (née Hill) turned down a research post to join the Royal Army Medical Corps. After general practice and medical officer posts, she became a founder member of the Royal College of Psychiatrists in 1972. She retired from her consultant posts in Sutton Coldfield and Walsall in her 70s. She researched school phobia, autism, and anorexia, and pioneered family therapy, running supervision and training sessions. Active in the community until shortly before her death, including as a school governor, she established in her 80s a group for teenage mothers with lottery and local authority funding. Predeceased by her husband, Chris, in 1998, she leaves four sons and 12 grandchildren.

Richard Baker

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Samareswar Bhattacharya



Former general surgeon West Wales Regional Health Authority (b 1919; q Calcutta 1944), died from a stroke on 26 April 2010.

Samareswar Bhattacharya ("Samar") came to England in 1945, and worked at several hospitals in London, including the Prince of Wales Hospital and the Royal Free, and developed a lifelong love of anatomy and embryology and the history and craft of surgery. He moved to Exeter and Hastings, where he worked until 1968.

Latterly he was a general surgeon in the West Midlands and then West Wales Regional Health Authority, where he developed an interest in urology, and was commended on retirement. In retirement he was much occupied with physics and was sustained by music, although he became increasingly deaf like his hero Beethoven. He leaves a wife, Sheila; three sons; and two grandsons.

Jo Bhattacharya

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Denis Vincent Primo D'Auria

Former senior lecturer, toxicology and occupational medicine, Cardiff University (b 1946; q Trinity College Dublin 1970), died from coronary thrombosis on 19 March 2010. After house jobs, Denis Vincent Primo D'Auria worked for three years in Italy for the European Commission before becoming medical officer at the Atomic Energy Research Establishment at Harwell in Oxfordshire. He was medical adviser and consultant physician to South West Thames Regional Health Authority, chief medical adviser to Midland Bank, and director of the occupational health service at Barts before going to Cardiff. Emeritus honorary editor of *Occupational Medicine*, he was also external examiner in Ireland and the Middle and Far East. His Catholic faith was central to his life, and before he died he had recently been elected president of the Cardiff Circle of the Catenian Association. He leaves a wife, Eithne; three children; and a grandson.

Aodhan O'Carroll

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Roger Duchene de Vere

Former consultant obstetrician and gynaecologist Westminster Hospital, London (b 1921; q St Thomas' Hospital, London, 1945; FRCS, FRCOG), d 30 November 2010. After two years in the Royal Navy, Roger Duchene de Vere trained in London and joined Westminster Hospital's staff in 1954. He pioneered epidural pain relief in labour, started to treat prolapse by vaginal hysterectomy, initiated



joint gynaecology/endocrinology meetings, and started the first multidisciplinary clinic for vulval conditions in the United Kingdom. Fluent in French, he consulted for a time in Paris. He was examiner for several universities and the royal college, and was known by his private patients as "Divine de Vere." Retiring in 1982 to look after his wife, Liz, he was named countryman of the year by *Country Life* in 1997 for his conservancy work on the River Kennet. He leaves three children.

**Gerald Westbury
Humphrey Roberts
Roger Marwood**

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Richard Charles Eve



Former general practitioner Taunton, Somerset (b 1953; q St Bartholomew's Hospital, London, 1977), died from prostate cancer on 22 January 2011. Richard Charles Eve was best known for his work in GP education, creating and piloting PUNs and DENs (patient's unmet needs and doctor's educational needs) in 1994. This educational tool has been adopted as a learning model by colleges worldwide, and is used by all general practitioners for education and appraisal. His career as respected and caring family doctor was further complemented by roles as police surgeon, GP tutor, trainer, lecturer, and author. He held athletic records and represented England at hockey as a schoolboy at Stowe. He had many interests, including polo and poetry, and approached everything in life with

positivity and energy, infectious to those around him. He leaves a wife, Gilly; three children; and a grandson.

Tom Eve

Cite this as: *BMJ* 2011;342:d1175

Ronald Michael Vanreenen



Former consultant histopathologist King Edward VII Memorial Hospital, Bermuda (b 1918; q Glasgow 1940; QHS, FRCPEd, FRCPath), d 24 July 2009.

After qualifying Ronald Michael Vanreenen ("Mike") joined the Indian Medical Service like his father. In 1946 he transferred to the Royal Army Medical Corps and was posted to various staff jobs in the United Kingdom. In 1951 he commanded 19 Field Ambulance in then Malaya and was mentioned in despatches. He was selected for specialist training in pathology at the age of 35, and became first professor and later director of army pathology. He was then consultant histopathologist in Bermuda for 11 years, retiring to Spain. Predeceased by his wife, Pat, in 2005, he leaves three daughters and two grandchildren.

John B Stewart

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Anna Wilkes (née Book)

Former medical practitioner East Ham, Willesden, and Hemel Hempstead local authorities (b 1924; q Durham 1946; DPH), d 30 August 2010. After qualification from Durham, Anna Wilkes (née Book) gained a diploma in public health. For several years before she married, in 1956, she worked as an assistant general practitioner and then for the local authority in Consett, Northumberland. When she married she came to London and worked for local authorities in East Ham, Willesden, and Hemel Hempstead. She leaves a husband, Derek.

Derek Wilkes

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