The nutritional status of patients with chronic renal failure (CRF) at the initiation of dialysis therapy and while on maintenance dialysis therapy is an important determinant of the morbidity and mortality associated with the disease.

The nutritional status of our CRF patients population has not being well characterized. In Nigeria, there is paucity of data on the prevalence of malnutrition amongst our CRF patients especially before the initiation of dialysis therapy. There is the need to know the prevalence and appreciate the magnitude of the problem in order to formulate a policy on routine nutritional assessment and intervention. 66 chronic renal failure patients being managed at the Renal Unit of University of Benin Teaching Hospital, Benin City were studied. The patients were made up of 45 males and 21 females with ages ranging between 18 years and 65 years. Patients with no evidence of nephrotic syndrome, chronic liver disease, HIV, tuberculosis, malignancy or steroid therapy were recruited for the study.

40 age and sex matched control subjects were also studied.

A multiparametric method of nutrition assessment was employed and this method involved the use of the well validated, tested and verified subjective global assessment (SGA). Weight change over six
months of follow up, body mass index, mid-upper arm circumference, triceps skin fold thickness, serum albumin concentration were also used to assess nutritional status. A three-day food diary was used to determine the average daily protein intake of the patients.

Malnutrition was present in 46% of the patients studied using SGA criteria and in 42% using two or more nutritional markers. Malnutrition in CRF patients (Pre-dialysis) is predominantly mild to moderate. Severe malnutrition is relatively uncommon in CRF patients before dialysis therapy. There is worsening of nutritional status as dietary protein intake decreases and renal function deteriorates from moderate renal insufficiency to end stage renal failure. When compared with SGA, serum albumin underestimated patients with malnutrition.

In conclusion there is a high prevalence of malnutrition in our CRF patients before the commencement of dialysis therapy, and the nutritional status of these patients at the start of dialysis therapy is a strong predictor of their short term and long term outcome. It is recommended that nutritional status of all chronic renal failure patients should be evaluated routinely using multiparametric method whenever they present at the hospital.