Meta- analysis (Cont p 3)

effect on heart disease risk of a Unilever margarin enriched with alpha-linolenic acid (ALA), a important short-chain omega-3 found to be rich i Mediterranean diets, well known for their healt promoting properties. The study also aimed t assess the effect of group education on the benefit associated with consuming a typica Mediterranean diet. Importantly, the subjects in th study all had multiple cardiovascular risk factors nearly half were smokers and too anti-hypertensive drugs, while over 40% ha family histories of cardiovascular risk.

Bemelmans and colleagues own findings, i contrast to their interpretation of these findings i the Hooper et al meta-analysis, ar overwhelmingly positive. They demonstrate clearl the beneficial effects

of ALA-enriched margarine on reducing hear disease risk. The study also shows that grou education led to healthier diets, with increase consumption of fish, and consequently lower hear disease risk factors.

These findings are actually fully in line wit another major study, the Lyons Diet Heart Study published in 1994 in the Lancet, which actuall provided the inspiration for Bemelmans an colleagues MARGARIN trial.

So, how was this study distorted to give the impression that omega-3 fats might be bad for you? This is down to the very small number of deaths recorded, which could just as easily be a functio of chance rather than any treatment effect. The study included only four deaths out of 266 subjects in total. The omega-3 meta-analysis authors managed to blacken this study because 3 out of 4 of these deaths (again from all-causes, not just cardiovascular disease) occurred in the high ALA, treatment group, while only one was in the low ALA, control group. This small number of deaths could easily have been a function of random, Çÿstatistical clustering", particularly given that risk factors appeared lower in the high ALA treatment group.

Dr Bemelmans has actually gone on public record since the release of Hooper etc. meta-analysis questioning the way in which her study has been used, and how her and her co-authors positive findings have been used to