



News Release

Malnutrition: UK's Silent Killer

Over 2,300ⁱ adults have needlessly died from diseases linked to malnutrition over a 10 year period

Malnutrition¹ is fast becoming the 21st century's silent killer, with over 2,300 adults dying from illnesses related to poor nutrition in hospitals alone. This is a worrying figure for a developed nation such as the UK.

It is also likely that this figure doesn't take into account the full scale of the problem, as Rick Wilson, Director of Nutrition and Dietetics, Kings College Hospital, explains: "Most people think that this figure underestimates the problem as it is not usually the case that Death Certificates are completed thoroughly."

The National Association of Care Catering believes this figure must be brought to the attention of the Coalition as a lack of proper nutrition is badly affecting the health of older people.

Only this week a coroner in North West Wales raised concern at the "number of pensioners dying alone at home and lying undiscovered for weeks". Speaking out at the inquest of a 70 year-old woman, he added that it is a "sad indictment on society where there is an increasing number of cases like this and one wonders whether society should be looking after its elderly better than it does".

Despite these tragic stories, some local authorities are already putting up their Community Meals charges by as much as 75% and in some areas they are scrapping their meals services altogether. This is likely to mean more people will become malnourished and the costs of caring for them are likely to increase.

Figures show that currently £13.6 billion (BAPEN 2009 figures) is spent annually on treating malnutrition in the UK. Yet the NACC warns that making an investment in the care catering sector now, rather than cutting these services, will actually help save money in the long term. For example, research in Australia has shown that spending £1 on good nutrition is likely to save £5 on the health budget as care packages are reduced.

The biggest challenge facing the sector is the growing number of over 65 year olds - in 2008 the figure was 16% of the population and in 2033 it is estimated to be 23%. Dementia is also set to rise in the next 10 years by 34% - all will need good nutritional care.



The current changes to budgets across councils and social care will have a drastic effect on these growing figures.

NACC spokesperson added: “In 2003 £7.9 billion was spent on malnutrition. Is it a coincidence that after the ‘Fair Access to Care’ criteria were introduced in 2004 we saw a rise in malnutrition cases? After all many preventative services were cut. These cuts were most likely due to commissioning services changing the criteria level and only responding to “critical and substantial need”.

A recent report published by the NACC (‘Personalisation, Nutrition and the Role of Community Meals’ (www.ilcuk.org.uk) identified that those working in the care catering sector as being in an ideal position to monitor the health of older people and encourage them to eat well, lowering the risk of malnutrition. Regular delivery of meals to the home is key to ensuring older people have regular contact with others.

“However, the need for Local Authorities to cut costs due to slashed budgets is leading to a reduction in these services, with personalisation reduced to the lowest common denominator in some cases, meaning social interaction and its vital role in good health is ignored,” added the NACC spokesperson.

As older people become more socially isolated, physical problems prevent or make it extremely difficult for them to prepare, cook and/or eat meals. A lack of motivation, company, depression and forgetfulness, along with problems linked to Dementia, could also contribute to the lack of eating.

Due to the cuts in services some of these people will not be able to access social care systems and will literally drop through the net. Shorter days and cold weather will also take their toll.

“With rises in heating costs, rents, Day Care/Home Care costs, and community meal costs where would you draw the line and what would you give up? Would it be one of your meals a day or even two?” said the spokesperson from the NACC.

Where will these Community Meals budget cuts end? The action of Local Authorities will no doubt put more pressure on the NHS and care homes. But will it also see, worst case scenario, old people dying in their own home with no support?

Ends

For more information and a copy of the report, please contact: Lucy Jones, **jag press & publicity** on: 07912567063/ 01403 793836 info@jagpresspublicity.co.uk

Notes to editors:



¹ Malnutrition is a state of nutrition in which a deficiency, excess, imbalance of energy, protein and other nutrients causes measurable adverse effects on tissue, body form (body shape, size and composition) and clinical outcomes (ENHA/BAPEN 2006).

The National Association of Care Catering (NACC) is a progressive organisation representing professionals providing catering to the care industry. They are recognised by Local Authorities, independent providers, the charitable sector and Government departments as a prime source of information and opinion on all aspects of catering within the care sector and whose primary aim is to improve standards.

The NACC works with a number of partners to:

- To promote and enrich the standard of catering within the care sector, whether that catering be provided by Social Care Departments or other Caring Agencies
- To provide a forum for debate among individuals, companies and organisations of all kinds involved in catering for the care sector
- To facilitate the exchange of information, experience and expertise
- To promote the development of professional standards among those involved in catering for the care sector
- To commission research into matters relating to catering for the care sector
- To publish guidelines, policy papers and authoritative statements on all aspects of catering for the care sector

ⁱ Office of National Statistics report showing between 1997 and 2007 some 2311 death certificates issued in UK hospitals cited malnutrition as a contributory factor