

November 2011



## **Malnutrition the Silent Killer**

The definition of 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).

### Current Figures

- £13.6 Billion spent on treating malnutrition in the UK
- 1 in 10 over 65's at risk of malnutrition
- 3 million at risk at anytime in UK

There are over 100 illnesses related to poor nutrition.

The biggest challenge facing the sector is the growing numbers of over 65 year olds. In 2008 this was 16% of the population, in 25 years' time this is estimated to be 23%. In addition, the number of people suffering from dementia over the next 10 years is set to increase by 34%. All these people will need good nutritional care

These key figures are why we need to address the problems facing care and health services in the UK. The cost of treating these illnesses is £13.6 billion (BAPEN's 2009 figures), and the risk of malnutrition in the UK is huge considering we are a developed nation. This was a rise from the £7.9 billion spent in 2003. Is it a coincidence that the "Fair Access to Care" criteria were introduced in 2004?

The current changes to budgets across councils and social care could well have a drastic effect on these growing figures. As local authority budgets have been squeezed, many preventative services are being cut and access levels to services have generally been raised to critical & substantial need only. Some authorities are putting up their charges by as much as 75% and in some areas they are scrapping their meals service altogether, potentially generating further rises in malnutrition cases.

Housing benefit reforms could leave some elderly people on such low incomes their health may be at risk, the charity Age UK has warned.

Age UK fears changes to the way maximum payments are calculated will leave some with less money for food and heating.

Policy director Andrew Harrop told the BBC: "We know from the government's own estimates that 80,000 older people are on local housing allowance and all of them would lose out, on average losing £12 a week, some of them losing £30 a week.

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.

Some of these people will not now access social care systems and literally drop through the net. Shorter days and cold weather also have their own drastic effects.

Rises in heating costs, rises in rents, rises in Day Care/Home Care costs, rises in 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?

Will these issues put more pressure on to the Health Services or mean more people entering Social Care provision, being supported on higher cost care packages or in a worst case scenario see them dying in their own home with no support?

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**Notes to editors:**

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 has a petition asking for support in raising awareness of this issue, and that of malnutrition to a wider audience. For more information log on to [www.thenacc.co.uk](http://www.thenacc.co.uk)