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from BAPEN the charity committed to nutritional treatment and support in hospital, care and the community

Malnutrition costs the UK more than £7.3 billion of actual expenditure each year - double the projected £3.5 billion cost of obesity

New Health Economic Report from BAPEN published Wednesday 14th December 2005

"Malnutrition in the UK costs in excess of £7.3 billion each year [note 1], more than double the projected £3.5 billion cost of obesity [note 2]," states Professor Marinos Elia, Chairman of BAPEN [note 3], in the charity's new health economic report on malnutrition, "yet it receives no government policy focus and no allocation of resources in secondary or primary health care."

"The bulk of the cost of malnutrition arises from the treatment of malnourished patients in hospital (~£3.8 billion) and in long-term care facilities (~£2.6 billion). Other associated costs arise from GP visits (~£0.49 billion), outpatient visits (£0.36 billion), and enteral and parenteral nutrition, tube feeding and oral nutritional supplementation in the community (~£0.15 billion)."

Malnourished individuals stay in hospital longer, succumb to infection more often, visit their GP on more occasions and require longer-term care and more intensive nursing care than individuals who are adequately nourished, accounting for an estimated additional cost of £5.3 billion.

"Around 30% of patients in hospitals and nursing homes are clinically malnourished and more than 10% of individuals aged over 65 years in the community are malnourished - over 3 million are estimated to be suffering from malnutrition at any one time in this developed 'land of plenty'," continues Professor Elia.

"These individuals, the vast majority elderly and with underlying disease, need to be screened for malnutrition so that appropriate nutritional treatment and a care plan can be provided. BAPEN's 'MUST' - the Malnutrition Universal Screening Tool [note 4]- provides a simple and quick solution to screening, enabling health and care professionals in hospital, care and the community to identify those already suffering or at risk of malnutrition.

"It is surprising that in England it has not been made mandatory for all patients to be screened for malnutrition on admission to hospital as it has in Scotland. It takes a period of time for an individual to become clinically malnourished, often starting in the community, but if at least it is picked up in hospital a great deal of suffering of patients and their families can be avoided. But as importantly significant costs can also be saved - creating a win-win situation for both individuals and health authorities."

The Report also examines retrospectively studies of the use of oral nutritional supplements in hospital concluding that whilst more research is required, there is clear evidence of benefit for sub-sets of patients, such as those undergoing abdominal surgery.

Concludes Professor Elia: "As the journey of the malnourished patient inevitably crosses a number of healthcare settings - community, hospital, primary care and nursing care - integrated economic analysis is essential so that the cost impact of malnutrition is clearly understood across health, social care and housing budgets.

Resources must be made available for the training of health and care staff in all settings so that malnourished patients and residents are identified and appropriate treatment and support provided. "

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Notes:

1. *The cost of disease-related malnutrition in the UK and economic considerations for the use of oral nutritional supplements (ONS) in adults*,
M. Elia (Chairman & Editor) R. Stratton, C. Russell, C. Green, F. Pan; BAPEN, 2005
2. Statistic from the National Obesity Forum www.nationalobesityforum.org.uk
3. BAPEN is the national registered charity committed to nutritional treatment and support in hospital, care and the community. Membership is drawn from clinicians, surgeons, nurses, dietitians, GPs and patients. For more information log on to www.bapen.org.uk (BAPEN - the British Association for Parenteral and Enteral Nutrition)
4. The 'MUST' - the Malnutrition Universal Screening Tool - is a 5-step flowchart using scoring the BMI, weight loss and underlying disease to determine the presence or risk of malnutrition. It has been piloted and tested in hospital, care and community settings and is currently being implemented in hospitals, nursing and residential care settings across the UK. Further information and a copy of the 'MUST' can be viewed and downloaded from www.bapen.org.uk

Further media information from Rhonda Smith 07887 714957. Professor Elia available for interview.