

Putting Nutrition at the Heart of Patient Care

Why is raising awareness of disease-related malnutrition important?

As we look ahead to Malnutrition Awareness Week (6-12 November), coordinated by BAPEN and the Malnutrition Taskforce, it can be useful to consider why raising awareness of malnutrition risk and how to effectively manage malnutrition is important.

Malnutrition Awareness Week was launched in 2018, to raise awareness and understanding of the risks of disease-related malnutrition across different sectors and settings, in local communities, and with health and social care professionals.

Malnutrition is an issue that can affect anyone and has impacts on all areas of life. In many cases, the risk factors for malnutrition can be effectively managed through public awareness to support people with good nutrition, and hydration, across all settings. Maintaining a good nutritional balance helps with better recovery, shorter hospital stays and reduced GP visits.¹

Improving the nutritional care provided to patients is a topic that is discussed across Europe and beyond as campaign groups and healthcare professional bodies look to raise the profile of this area of patient care within their healthcare systems and national governments.

Earlier this year BSNA attended the Optimal Nutritional Care for All (ONCA) International Conference, with the conference theme being 'Continuity of Nutrition Care - The power of concerted efforts against malnutrition'.

The ONCA campaign is a multi-stakeholder initiative to facilitate greater screening for risk of disease-related malnutrition/undernutrition and nutritional care implementation across Europe.

This year's conference took place on 15 & 16 June in Amsterdam, bringing together healthcare professionals, patients, policy makers and industry representatives.

The conference covered a variety of topics with speakers mainly from The Netherlands, informing delegates of challenges, opportunities and progress towards identifying and managing disease-related malnutrition.

The common themes from the conference were the lack of understanding of disease-related malnutrition in primary care, with more education needing to be provided for GPs. In addition, patients need to be empowered and involved in the discussions and decisions about their condition.

Delegates also received updates from the Nutrition Education in Medical Schools (NEMS)² Programme, the Global Leadership

Initiative on Malnutrition (GLIM) – a framework for diagnosing malnutrition, and learnt about countries initiatives including the Malnutrition Awareness Week across Europe.

The UK Malnutrition Awareness Week is an essential way to increase understanding of malnutrition across healthcare professionals and wider groups, sharing best practice in identifying people at risk of malnutrition and ways to care and support them appropriately, to improve nutritional care for the long term.

Research evidence allows for compelling education and guidance to promote effective nutritional care, and clinical nutrition messages are now stronger than ever.

For those working in nutritional care, the range of tools available to identify nutritional risk are well known. Effective nutritional care can prevent complications, improve outcomes and enhance quality of life. Yet across the wider healthcare environment, awareness of the devastating clinical impact of disease-related malnutrition remains inadequate, and access to optimal nutritional care is often limited.

For organisations such as ONCA, the European Society for Clinical Nutrition and Metabolism (ESPEN) and similar global societies, along with our own BAPEN and Malnutrition Taskforce, the need to promote the risk factors for disease-related malnutrition and good nutritional care is clear.

With an estimated 3 million people either malnourished or at risk of malnutrition in the UK,¹ malnutrition is a significant public health issue. The cost of malnutrition to the health and social care system is estimated to be almost £20 billion per year.¹

BSNA fully supports Malnutrition Awareness Week 2023 in reinforcing the importance of good nutritional care across health and care services, giving focus to how integrated care systems can prioritise nutrition and hydration for patients, and energising the sharing of good practice to tackle malnutrition, whether patients are in hospital, a care home or in their own homes.

References: 1. Elia M (2015). The cost of malnutrition in England and potential cost savings from nutritional interventions (full report): A report on the cost of disease-related malnutrition in England and a budget impact analysis of implementing the NICE clinical guidelines/quality standard on nutritional support in adults: Malnutrition Action Group of BAPEN and the National Institute for Research Southampton Biomedical Research Centre. 2. ESPEN. ESPEN Fact Sheet. Accessed online: www.espen.org/files/ESPEN-Fact-Sheet-NEMS.pdf (Aug 2023).

About the British Specialist Nutrition Association

BSNA is the trade association representing the manufacturers of products designed to meet the particular nutritional needs of individuals; these include specialist products for infants and young children (including infant formula, follow-on formula, young child formula and complementary weaning foods), medical nutrition products for diseases, disorders and medical conditions, including oral nutritional supplements, enteral tube feeding and parenteral nutrition, as well as companies who aseptically compound chemotherapy, parenteral nutrition and CIVAS.