



An Overview of BSNA

The leading voice for specialist nutrition in the UK

The role of BSNA

The British Specialist Nutrition Association (BSNA) is the trade association that represents the manufacturers of specialist nutrition products, as well those companies who produce aseptically prepared injectable solutions, including chemotherapy, parenteral nutrition, and central intravenous additive services (CIVAS).

At BSNA, our purpose is to act as the representative body of credible and responsible specialist nutrition and independent aseptic compounding industries. We work to:

- Communicate the value of nutrition for improved health
- Ensure patients and consumers have suitable access to products
- Ensure products continue to follow strict regulations and safety requirements.

In this article, we look at the various sectors BSNA represents and share some updates on areas BSNA has been working on and activity within the sectors.

BSNA works with our member companies across four key sectors – medical foods, including oral nutritional supplements (ONS) and enteral tube feeds; infant nutrition, including infant formulas and commercial baby foods, parenteral nutrition, and the independent aseptic compounding sector who manufacture intravenous medicines and nutrition products. In addition, we have an associate member committee – the Enteral Products Safety Group – representing the ancillaries and giving sets with the goal to improve safety in patients receiving enteral feeds. Food safety is also paramount across all of our sectors and, in 2023, the Food Safety

Working Group was established to optimise the safety of specialist nutrition products through the sharing of best practice and monitoring regulatory divergence between the UK and EU.

Medical nutrition

More than 3 million people in the UK are estimated to be malnourished or at risk of malnutrition,¹ and appropriate medical nutrition support has the potential to significantly reduce the prevalence of malnutrition, consequently saving the UK's health service hundreds of millions of pounds per year.

BSNA members produce a range of medical foods – otherwise known as foods for special medical purposes (FSMPs) – designed to help meet the nutritional needs of patients who are affected by or at risk of malnutrition due to a disease, disorder or medical condition that makes it difficult for their nutritional needs to be satisfied through the consumption of other foods alone. This includes ONS, enteral tube feeds and metabolic products in the form of food, drinks, ONS and tube feeds designed specifically for use by patients with inherited metabolic disorders.

Medical foods produced by BSNA members also include specialist infant milks and protein substitutes for older children and adults.

The majority of medical foods are available on prescription. The Advisory Committee on Borderline Substances (ACBS)² is responsible for assessing applications from manufacturers for these products to be approved for Part XV of the drug tariff through an application process. This ensures the products are safe and appropriate for the management of the disease, disorder or medical condition the product is prescribed for, providing reassurance to healthcare professionals.

BSNA has recently published an update to our leaflet on nutritional care, 'Better Care through Better Nutrition', which highlights the seriousness of malnutrition and how medical foods can be a valuable solution in the management of patients who have or are at risk of disease-related malnutrition.

BSNA was also pleased to attend this year's BAPEN Annual Conference, where the team held our regular exhibition stand. The two-day Conference, which took place on 5-6 November in Gateshead, brought together healthcare professionals and industry to discuss the latest developments in research, covering clinical practice and product development. The topics covered included intestinal failure, nutrition in older people, oral and enteral nutrition in palliative care and complications of home parenteral support. Sustainability was also a common theme throughout the whole conference.



Our members are also always delighted to support Malnutrition Awareness Week, which takes place every November, organised by the Malnutrition Taskforce and BAPEN. As the Government develops its new 10 Year Plan for the NHS, BSNA will continue to press the case for greater priority to be given to identifying and managing malnutrition, to mitigate the serious consequences for patients and reduce huge costs for health and social care.

In addition to the enteral feed itself, some BSNA members provide a range of complementary services to support patients receiving enteral tube feeding at home. These include the supply of pumps, ancillaries and nursing support.

Infant nutrition

Breastfeeding is best for babies as well as providing benefits for mothers. However, for those who cannot or choose not to breastfeed, a scientifically developed infant formula milk is the only suitable alternative to meet the nutritional needs of infants from birth.

BSNA members also produce follow-on formula, which is developed to meet the nutritional needs of infants from 6 to 12 months, to be used as part of a mixed weaning diet and young child formula designed for toddlers aged one to three years and a source of important nutrients such as B vitamins, calcium and iodine. BSNA were pleased to see the agreement of a new global standard on follow-up formula and young child formula at the end of last year.

The new standard, agreed by Codex Alimentarius and all its member states, reflects the different dietary requirements of these two age groups and translates the existing scientific consensus on the required nutrition intake for both age groups into new rules on the composition and ingredients to be used for these two products categories. Particularly, the macronutrient balance between proteins, lipids and carbohydrates better reflects the dietary requirements of young children.

Lastly, our members produce a range of specialist formula milks, made for infants who have specific dietary requirements associated with a disease, disorder or medical condition that may be difficult or impossible to manage through breastmilk or the use of standard infant formula alone. This could include conditions such as allergies, digestive disorders, disturbances in amino acid or fatty acid metabolism or cystic fibrosis.

Complementary baby foods

BSNA also represent manufacturers of complementary foods specifically designed for the nutritional requirements of infants and young children up to three years of age.

Commercial complementary foods are specifically regulated for under UK law, which lays down composition and safety criteria. This legislation incorporates the specific nutritional needs of infants and young children, while also taking into account the strict food safety requirements necessary to protect this vulnerable population group.

The areas covered by the legislation include very strict pesticide controls, clear levels for appropriate amounts of protein, carbohydrate, fat, vitamins and minerals, and sets out appropriate textures to help the transition to family foods. The regulations also limit salt levels and do not allow the use of artificial additives, including artificial colours or sweeteners.

Parenteral nutrition

Parenteral nutrition (PN), the provision of nutrition directly into the veins, provides a lifeline for those who are unable to achieve adequate oral or enteral nutritional intake.

Annually, in the UK, 2,500 patients receive PN on a permanent basis and 2,500 receive PN on short-term basis, such as following surgery.³



“Our members carry out extensive research to ensure that products are safe and more advanced than ever before. The products our members manufacture play a key role in supporting people during the most vulnerable times in their lives, whether it be early life, during illness or end of life”

BSNA has been delivering free education sessions to dietetic students at universities on the basics of PN. In addition, BSNA will also be hosting a 3-part webinar series specifically for dietitians in quarter 1 of 2025, so keep a look out on the BSNA website for more information!

In addition, we have updated our ‘Guide to Parenteral Nutrition’ infographic, which provides an overview of parenteral nutrition and the importance of a nutrition support team (NST). This is available on our website alongside a wide range of resources on topics across all the sectors we represent.

Independent aseptic compounders

BSNA also represents companies in the ‘independent aseptic compounding’ sector, who manufacture aseptically prepared

intravenous solutions used to treat and/or manage a range of diseases, disorders and medical conditions, such as chemotherapy, antibiotics and any preparation of a drug that needs to be reconstituted, diluted or added to an infusion to create a ready-to-use injectable drug (referred to as CIVAS), which therefore needs to be made aseptically to avoid any contamination by microorganisms.

Aseptic production involves the manipulation of sterile starting materials and components in such a way that they remain sterile and uncontaminated whilst being prepared in a form suitable for administering to patients. This is often carried out by nursing staff on the ward immediately before administration to the patient, however manufacturing through a centralised service frees up nursing time and reduces risks associated with preparation.

The sector is a valued partner of the NHS, providing about 50% of aseptic manufacturing capacity and delivering approximately four million units of PN, chemotherapy and CIVAS per year. Our members are working with the NHS to ensure that future demand for aseptic solutions can be met, recognising the increasing numbers of patients who will need treatment, such as chemotherapy and PN support in the future.

Food safety

A Food Safety committee was established by BSNA to monitor regulatory divergence between the EU and UK following the end of the Brexit transition period in December 2020. The group works to optimise food safety across the specialist nutrition sectors through the sharing of information (in compliance with competition legislation) concerning food safety issues and any upcoming challenges. The group analyses the potential impact of divergent regulation and makes recommendations for mitigating actions that could be taken. This includes responding to Government consultations and proactively engaging officials to ensure those who rely on specialist nutrition products can continue to access them.

Research and innovation for the future

Our members carry out extensive research to ensure that products are safe and more advanced than ever before. The products our members manufacture play a key role in supporting people during the most vulnerable times in their lives, whether it be early life, during illness or end of life. It is a responsibility BSNA members take very seriously.

For more information about the sectors that the British Specialist Nutrition Association represents, you can visit our website at: www.bsna.co.uk.



References: 1. Elia M (2015). The cost of malnutrition in England and potential cost savings from nutritional interventions. Malnutrition Action Group of BAPEN and the National Institute for Health Research Southampton Biomedical Research Centre. BAPEN. 2. Advisory Committee on Borderline Substances (ACBS). Accessed online: www.gov.uk/government/groups/advisory-committee-on-borderline-substances (Oct 2024) 3. NHS England (2023). Severe Intestinal Failure Service (Adults). Available at www.england.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/170077-230701S-intestinal-failure-adults-serv-spec-v1.3.pdf (Oct 2024).

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.

