

Press Release



For immediate release

23 November 2011

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UK's Leading Dietetic Association Responds to Care Neglect for the Elderly Inquiry

Basic care for the elderly in their own homes in England is so bad it breaches human rights at times, an inquiry says.

The home care review by the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) highlighted cases of physical abuse, theft, neglect and disregard for privacy and dignity. In the review it highlights, amongst other issues, older people not being given enough support to eat and drink, with some care staff saying health and safety rules prevent them preparing hot meals for the older people they care for.

The British Dietetic Association (BDA) has just launched a campaign called **Mind the Hunger Gap**, which aims to highlight levels of malnutrition in older people living in their own homes. This latest review by the EHRC ties directly into the BDA's campaign aims and was today labelled "a dire state of affairs," by the BDA Honorary Chairman, Helen Davidson.

Mind the Hunger Gap involves calling on all dietitians in the UK to highlight the national disgrace that conservatively estimated involves around 1,000,000 (one million) older people in the UK eating less than one square meal a day. This figure does not include those older people in a hospital or care setting, it is those older people living in our community or, as they have become, the 'invisible' population.

Malnutrition does not discriminate and impacts on people regardless of age, gender or race.

While The World Health Organization cites malnutrition as *the* greatest single threat to the world's public health, it is still widely believed that malnutrition is restricted to the third world population. Quite simply, it is not.

For the first time, the BDA has launched **Mind the Hunger Gap** as an online-based campaign and dietitians and members of the public will be directed to the campaign

website (www.mindthehungergap.com) to download various materials and campaign tools to highlight the issue locally, while the BDA will raise the issue on a national level. Importantly, there is also an online check list for those worried that their friends, family members or neighbours may be suffering from malnutrition.

Speaking about the campaign, the Honorary Chairman of the BDA, Helen Davidson, said:

“Having enough to eat and drink is one of the most basic human needs, yet today in the UK older people living in their own homes are simply being forgotten about or are somehow not being picked up by the system as suffering from hunger.

“Malnutrition and mortality are usually closely linked. For more than 10 years we have known about the public health scandal that is malnutrition in the UK yet still, vulnerable older people are going hungry day in day out in the confines of their own homes. This forgotten about population are surviving, if that’s the word, on less than one meal per day and, we all know, that this leads to poor health, rising hospital admissions and a massive financial burden to the NHS.

“As Honorary Chairman of the British Dietetic Association, I am proud to announce the launch of **Mind the Hunger Gap** and I call to action all the UK dietitians and wider public to do their bit to get this issue raised in their communities.”

Adding her voice of support, Siân Burton, member of the BDA Council, said:

“One of our aims with **Mind the Hunger Gap** is to highlight the vital role dietitians play in tackling malnutrition levels in older people. We need to do all we can to ensure current community services, such as meals on wheels and lunch clubs, are protected and seek to improve these services across the board.

“Dietitians are the only qualified health professionals that assess, diagnose and treat diet and nutrition problems at an individual and wider public health level. The profession uses the most up to date public health and scientific research on food, health and disease, which is then translated into practical guidance. Indeed, dietitians are uniquely placed to be at the forefront of this campaign.”

The **Mind the Hunger Gap** will call for local and national support to highlight:

- Malnutrition costs over £13 billion across the UK. It is vital to protect current services, and extend provision to reduce these spiralling costs of care packages and readmissions.
- Protect at least one meal a day by ring-fencing funding for community meal provision at a local level.
- Dietitians have the expertise to lead the nutrition pathway across the whole health and social care system.

- Social isolation and fragmented services have left older people excluded and invisible. Food is a basic human right and it's everybody's responsibility to stamp out starvation in their community.
- With social care budgets being devolved for local implementation, there is an opportunity now to plan and promote collaborative solutions at a local level.

The **Mind the Hunger Gap** campaign website can be found at www.mindthehungergap.com with campaign tools for the dietetic profession and wider public. Campaign tools will be added to and developed as the campaign progresses, so please check back from time to time.

Importantly, the campaign website will also feature an easy to use checklist tool so members of the public who are worried about family members, friends and neighbours can make an easy, unintrusive initial assessment with tips and ideas of what to do next.

ENDS

**For more information / interview requests, please contact the BDA Press Office on
0870 850 2517**

Notes to the Editor:

- **Mind the Hunger Gap Facts & Figures**

More than 3 million people in the UK are at risk of malnutrition with the vast majority, about 93%, living in the community setting, 5% in residential care and 2% in hospital

One million older people in the United Kingdom eat less than one meal a day.

Greater use of healthcare and costs associated with malnutrition mean:

- 65% more GP visits;
- 82% more hospital admissions;
- 30% longer hospital stay.

The health and social care costs in the United Kingdom directly associated with malnutrition comes to more than £13 billion per annum (based on 2007 prices).

Problems associated with malnutrition include:

- Poorer immune responses, meaning the likelihood of infections and ill health is greatly increased.
- Reduced muscle strength.
- Weaker respiratory (breathing) muscles, which result in breathing problems and frequent chest infections.
- More difficulty keeping warm.

- Slower wound healing and longer time needed to recover from illness.
- Low mood, little interest in everyday activities and self neglect.
- Increased amount of admissions and readmissions to hospital, and longer time spent on each admission.
- Increased difficulty conceiving.

In the fight against malnutrition, dietitians should:

- Provide specialised dietary advice.
 - Be involved in the early stages once a patient has been screened.
 - Be an integral member of the secondary and primary care teams.
 - Help devise and implement effective nutrition policy locally.
 - Take a lead in the coordinating a nutrition steering committee/group in the hospital and community environment to ensure provision of appropriate nutritional management, care pathways and monitoring happens.
 - Offer appropriate nutrition advice on an individual/group level.
 - Train and support other healthcare professionals on how to identify risk of malnutrition.
 - Assess an individual's nutritional/dietary requirements.
 - Contribute to delivering cost effective services.
- Visit the BDA website at www.bda.uk.com
 - Visit the **Mind the Hunger Gap** campaign website at www.mindthehungergap.com
 - The British Dietetic Association, founded in 1936, is the professional association for registered dietitians in Great Britain and Northern Ireland. It is the nation's largest organisation of food and nutrition professionals with over 6,000 members.
 - Dietitians are the only nutrition professionals to be statutorily regulated, and governed by an ethical code, to ensure that they always work to the highest standard. Dietitians work in the NHS, private practice, industry, education, research, sport, media, public relations, publishing, Non Government Organisations and government. Their advice influences food and health policy across the spectrum from government, local communities and individuals.