



Press Release

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National Charity Abbeyfield Joins UK Dietitians in Plugging the Hunger Gap Over the Christmas Holidays

The British Dietetic Association (BDA) is throwing its full support behind an innovative venture by The Abbeyfield Society called **Companionship at Christmas 2011**.

Abbeyfield is inviting older people, who might otherwise be alone over the Christmas season, to spend time at a participating Abbeyfield house for a free lunch or even an overnight stay, giving an excellent alternative to older people spending the Christmas holidays alone.

The first phase of the **Mind the Hunger Gap** campaign will involve 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 known, the 'invisible' population.

Speaking about the Abbeyfield's **Companionship at Christmas 2011**, the Honorary Chairman of the BDA, Helen Davidson, said:

"What an amazing thing to do. We know that on any given day, around one million older people living in their own homes are going hungry. Of course, that is bad enough in itself, but can you imagine spending the Christmas holidays in that

situation. It doesn't even bear thinking about, but sadly that is very much the reality for many many older people in the UK today.

"Not only will the Abbeyfield project go a long way in giving companionship and comfort to many, vitally for many it could be their first proper meal in a long time. I would urge anybody reading this, who qualifies to take part, to do so.

"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."

Samantha Alleyne from Abbeyfield added:

"We believe that nutritious meals are the cornerstone of ensuring the best of health for the body, mind and soul. Every resident living in an Abbeyfield house receives home-cooked meals every day. We recognise the importance of providing freshly prepared meals, made from quality produce. We welcome the spotlight the BDA is shining on this very important issue. Our winter campaign, Companionship at Christmas, is our way of extending an invitation to many older people who live alone and don't enjoy the benefits of what should be a basic right. We are offering the gift of companionship and the chance to enjoy a festive, hot meal at a time of year when everyone should be entitled to one."

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 will be launching **Mind the Hunger Gap** as an online-based campaign and dietitians 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.

While primarily a dietitian-led campaign, the **Mind the Hunger Gap** website will also have various tools that members of the public can use to add their support.

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

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

Notes to the Editor:

- Visit the BDA website at www.bda.uk.com
- Visit the **Mind the Hunger Gap** campaign website at www.mindthehungergap.com
- To find out more about Abbeyfield's **Companionship at Christmas 2011**, please go to <http://www.abbeyfield.com/Pages/Cope@Xmas2011.aspx>
- **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.
- 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.