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## **MALNUTRITION: EUROPE'S HIDDEN WEIGHT PROBLEM**

### **Film Launched by Leading Nutrition and Health Groups Calls for Solutions to Address Malnutrition & its Consequences**

In Europe today, malnutrition is not always recognised and often neglected which makes the problem of malnutrition as serious as the health threat of obesity according to the new short film entitled '*Malnutrition – Another Weight Problem*'. Launched by the European Society for Clinical Nutrition and Metabolism (ESPEN), the European Nutrition for Health Alliance (ENHA) and the Medical Nutrition International Industry group (MNI), this film calls for a concerted action from governments, health institutions and professionals to address this issue.

In Europe, malnutrition often affects the elderly living either at home or in nursing institutions, yet it is rarely recognised. It is estimated that up to 50 million Europeans (or people) are malnourished. Studies show that one third of patients in hospital and nursing homes are malnourished as are 10 percent of individuals over the age of 65 in the European Union (EU).

In the film, ESPEN's President and Co- Chair of the Alliance, Prof Olle Ljungqvist, calls for urgent and effective action: "Malnutrition is a major problem in the community, care homes and hospitals and has severe health implications. Individuals have a right to expect adequate nutritional as well as clinical care from healthcare professionals, yet this is not always addressed."

Malnutrition can occur because an individual is not getting enough food or when adequate nutrients are consumed but are not well digested or absorbed properly. In hospital-related malnutrition this can result in compromised immune responses, increased risk of infections, poor wound healing, delayed recovery from illness and longer hospitalization. Health professionals have an important part to play in ensuring that patients maintain a healthy diet whilst in hospital, yet the recent Nutrition Day Project which surveyed more than 50,000 hospital patients across the EU showed that only 40 percent of patients ate all their meals whilst in hospital.

Not only does malnutrition have major health implications but its consequences are also expensive to treat. In the EU, for instance, the cost of treating patients with disease-related malnutrition is considerable and approximately twice that of the management of obesity and its consequences.

“We already have the tools to prevent malnutrition”, commented Jen Kondrup, Professor of Clinical Nutrition at the University of Copenhagen, Denmark, “Nutritional risk screening tools are effective in gathering information to assess a patient’s nutritional status but healthcare and social professionals must recognise the need to use these tools and to integrate nutritional care protocols into community care and disease management.”

Whilst obesity is a nutritional problem that regularly hits the headlines, malnutrition is still under recognised. ESPEN, the European Nutrition Health Alliance (ENHA) and MNI are all calling for governments, social and health care professionals, healthcare institutions and the general public across Europe to be more aware of the threat of malnutrition and to create a climate of shared responsibility to address this issue. Healthcare professionals with specialist nutritional skills are also being called on to use the film to educate colleagues to reduce the unnecessary threat of malnutrition in Europe.

### **Resources and Notes to Editors**

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- ‘*Malnutrition: Another Weight Problem*’ is available at the ESPEN website at: <http://www.espen.org/video.html>
- For further information about the ESPEN congress visit: <http://www.espen.org/vienna/default.html>, where more information about malnutrition issues in Europe will be discussed by the world’s leading scientists.

### **About ESPEN**

ESPEN is dedicated to all issues relevant to the field of clinical nutrition and metabolism and encourages the rapid diffusion of knowledge and its application in the field of nutrition. The organisation promotes experimental and clinical research, fosters high ethical standards of practice and investigation and promotes contact between investigators and clinicians in related fields.

<http://www.espen.org>

### **About ENHA**

Today, malnutrition is not given the place it deserves on national or European policy agendas. Nutrition and Health strategies concentrate all too often on dealing with the problem of over-nutrition (i.e. obesity) which is indeed very important; however, the equally important problem of malnutrition is largely neglected.

It is against this background that a group of stakeholders from across the nutrition and health arena have formed the European Nutrition for Health Alliance (ENHA) in a united effort to raise awareness of the importance and the urgency of the issue of malnutrition and to build an agenda for action at the European level.

The Alliance is chaired by Professor Olle Ljungqvist, Chair of the European Society for Clinical Nutrition and Metabolism (ESPEN). Co-chair is Professor Jean-Pierre Baeyens, President of the clinical section of the International Association of Gerontology (IAG) and of the European Union Geriatric Medicine Society (EUGMS). <http://www.european-nutrition.org>

## **About MNI**

The International Medical Nutrition Industry (MNI) group brings together companies providing products and services to optimise patient outcome through specialised nutritional solutions. It aims to build an environment which promotes the translation of clinical nutrition research into standard practice.

<http://www.mni-online.com>