

Raising Awareness and Understanding Malnutrition

ESPEN 2024 and Malnutrition Awareness Week

As November sees the seventh UK Malnutrition Awareness Week (#UKMAW2024), run by the Malnutrition Taskforce (MTF) and BAPEN during 11th November and 17th November 2024, the month is another opportunity to raise awareness and understanding of the risks of preventable malnutrition across different sectors and settings. The UK week ties in with the annual international campaign dedicated to raising global awareness about disease-related malnutrition (DRM), and its profound impact on patient's wellbeing and public health.

Along with the wide range of activities being run across the UK by BAPEN and the MTF, the European Society for Clinical Nutrition and Metabolism (ESPEN) leads the international awareness campaign. This campaign hosts educational events, workshops, and informative webinars, all designed to explore the complexities of DRM at multiple levels.

This year, ESPEN in collaboration with UEG (United European Gastroenterology) and WONCA (World Organization of Family Doctors) will present two webinars on clinical nutrition in patients with digestive diseases and in the primary care setting. ESPEN also works with the European Nutrition for Health Alliance (ENHA) to engage policy makers and drive change at a political level. The campaign will host a webinar on 'Nutrition Care in the Primary Care settings.' There is lots of information about the UK awareness week through the Malnutrition Taskforce website: www.malnutritiontaskforce.org.uk and information, event links and materials on the international campaign are available at ESPEN's website: www.espen.org.

In September ESPEN also held its 26th ESPEN Congress on Clinical Nutrition and Metabolism, in Milan, Italy. 2024 was a landmark gathering that brought together 4,820 participants from 128 countries, with 1280 abstracts presented, encompassing state-of-the-art lectures, innovative symposia, hands-on workshops, and panel discussions. The Congress recognised the valuable work that has taken place between ESPEN and WHO Europe to collaborate on the fight against disease-related malnutrition. The organisations have published a new fact sheet, 'Disease-Related Malnutrition – Time for Action', intended for national and regional policymakers in healthcare (<https://iris.who.int/handle/10665/375033>). It provides a concise overview of the actions recommended by ESPEN in guidelines and position papers to strengthen nutritional care for the prevention and management of disease-related malnutrition in primary care and for hospital outpatients and inpatients.

In the WHO European Region, about 40% of inpatients lose weight unintentionally, and half do not eat well and are at risk of malnutrition. Nearly half of inpatients do not receive nutritional care, and only one third of patients who are unable to eat due to their condition receive oral nutritional supplements or artificial nutrition.

The fact sheet also proposes a number of recommendations to prioritise nutritional care, to ensure that patients receive the proper nutrition they need to fight illness, recover faster and live healthier lives. WHO recommends a 4-step approach to nutritional care:

- **Screening:** early identification of malnutrition risk is crucial. Standardised tools can be used by any healthcare professional.
- **Diagnosis and assessment:** detailed evaluation determines the cause and severity of malnutrition.
- **Personalised treatment:** this may include dietary adjustments, oral supplements or even tube feeding, depending on the patient's needs.
- **Monitoring and evaluation:** regular monitoring ensures progress and allows for adjustments in the treatment plan.

To accelerate the progress in tackling disease-related malnutrition, WHO/Europe experts took part in the 'Joint Session on Ageing and Disease-Related Malnutrition' at the Congress in September.

During the session, health professionals, researchers and decision-makers from across the EU discussed how to assess disease-related malnutrition at the healthcare level and take effective measures to tackle the issue in the long run.

BSNA supports both the UK campaign and our colleagues at ESPEN and others backing the global Malnutrition Awareness Week 2024.

As we await the new Labour Government's 10 Year Plan for the NHS, it is clear prevention, early intervention and care closer to home will be key centrepieces of the plan and as WHO Europe has advocated, nutritional care should be prioritised as a clear demonstration of these principles.

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.