

4th 'MICRONUTRIENTS AND HEALTH' APPG MEETING HIGHLIGHTS THE IMPORTANCE OF NUTRITION AND DEMENTIA

On 14th March, the 'Micronutrients and Health' All Party Parliamentary Group, the Secretariat for which is managed by the Health Food Manufacturers' Association (HFMA), held its fourth meeting in the House of Commons. The meeting focused on '*Nutrition and Healthy Ageing of the Brain*', and Rosie Cooper, Labour MP for West Lancashire and Chair of the group, praised the HFMA's efforts in promoting education and support for an area that could have significant health benefits for older adults, as well as very positive social and economic benefits.

Discussions were led by **Professor Louise Dye**, Chair in Nutrition and Behaviour, Human Appetite Research Unit, School of Psychology, University of Leeds and **Professor Helene McNulty**, Professor of Nutritional Science, University of Ulster.

Professor Dye used her extensive experience in the field of nutrition and cognitive function to communicate to the group the importance of diet and nutrients in preventing or slowing down cognitive decline. This included the mechanisms of how micronutrients may help the ageing brain, where research and public health efforts should be focused and the potential impact on society and on hospital places, if specific nutrient intakes could be improved.

Professor McNulty presented evidence linking B-vitamins with cognition in ageing, drawing attention to the fact that the number of cases of dementia in Ireland is set to double over the next 20 year. She explained how those at risk of mild cognitive impairment who could be helped to preserve their brain function through diet before there is greater decline. Professor McNulty discussed her own research and the importance of having the optimum levels of four B-vitamins; folate, vitamin B12, B6 and B2 and the concern that those at risk of dementia may not be clinically deficient, so this would not be 'flagged' by the doctor, but they still may benefit from intervention through taking a supplement.

At the end of the meeting, Rosie Cooper thanked both speakers for their excellent presentations, and said: *"As you will have heard from Helene McNulty today, aside from the obvious need to reduce the tragic human cost of dementia, there are real savings to be made to the cost of healthcare for the elderly if we took a more proactive stance. This aligns perfectly with one of the action steps from our last meeting in December, where we agreed that we would strongly consider how to quantify any potential savings to the healthcare system generally from supplementation so that we can get more traction for supporting an initiative here in Westminster."*

It is also clear to me that there may be a potential to reach out more to the charities involved in this area so they are aware of the very latest research and the direct relevance of certain micronutrients, and I'm going to propose that this group takes that on board as an action step from today."

HFMA Chair, Robert Taylor, said: *"It is so encouraging to see this important APPG group gaining such momentum with each meeting. Both Professor Dye and Professor McNulty engaged the group on what is a truly vital issue for all of us. Their lifetime of research in this area was communicated with great passion and expertise and it was remarkable to learn the huge impact that relatively small changes in micronutrients status can have on the ageing brain. We have some further very worthwhile and important action steps to now move forward with."*



The APPG group on Micronutrients for Health meets four times a year to discuss key nutrition considerations, and aims to lobby effectively for better targeted guidance on nutrient intakes, by engaging with UK Department of Health and other stakeholders.

For more information on the All Party Parliamentary Group for Micronutrients and Health please contact appg@hfma.co.uk

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The HFMA

The Health Food Manufacturers' Association (HFMA) is the voice of the UK's natural health industry and represents more than 125 manufacturers and suppliers of natural health products.

Founded in 1965, the HFMA is a not-for-profit organisation which operates long-standing codes of practice to ensure that member companies adhere to high standards and offer good quality, safe products supported by responsible, lawful information.

For further information about the HFMA, visit www.hfma.co.uk.

Note to the editor:

Professor Louise Dye has held MRC and Royal Society Postdoctoral Fellowships in the UK and Europe and a EU funded Marie Curie Professorial Fellowship in Jena, Germany. She began her career in Human Psychopharmacology and has over 20 years' experience in the assessment of cognitive function following nutritional and pharmacological intervention.

Since joining Ulster University as lecturer in 1992, subsequently becoming a senior lecturer in 1997, and awarded a chair in 2001, **Professor Helene McNulty** has made a tremendous impact within the Biomedical Sciences Research Institute. Professor McNulty has achieved and sustained pre-eminence in her field of nutrition nationally and internationally with significant demonstrable influence.