
PRESS RELEASE

New research: Focus on nutrition in the elderly pays off

Society can save millions if the quality of life of elderly people is improved. This is the result if hospitals and municipalities systematically join forces to avoid undernutrition in the elderly. But there is a lack of persistent political and management focus. These are conclusions from a new EU supported study conducted at Aarhus University and Aarhus University Hospital in Denmark.

Undernutrition is a major, but often invisible problem, which negatively impacts on the health and quality of life of the elderly as well as costs for society. Undernutrition is the cause of an increased need for hospital admissions, medical consultations and home care.

Barriers must be broken

In a new study, Jette Lindegaard Pedersen, RN, Associate professor and PhD, gathers the new knowledge of elderly and undernutrition; and the conclusion is clear:

“When you really make an effort to ensure proper nutrition in the elderly, it has a positive effect. Unfortunately, there are many barriers preventing focus on the nutritional needs in the elderly. An example could be the lack of transfer of information when the elderly is discharged from hospital to his or her own home, low involvement of relatives, lack of knowledge among health professionals and many other reasons”, says Jette Lindegaard Pedersen from Department of Geriatrics at Aarhus University Hospital and Associate professor at Department of Clinical Medicine at Aarhus University.

She will present the results of the study for the first time at the EU conference “Preventing undernutrition in elderly citizens” at Aarhus University on Tuesday the 29 October 2019.

Need for political action

To avoid unnecessary weight loss in the elderly, which may result in diseases and reduced quality of life, politicians and decision-makers in the healthcare sector will need to act and initiate the necessary interventions; and the study concludes that they have to be persistent.

At the conference, researchers and professional experts will meet politicians to share knowledge and find solutions together.

“We know that the group of elderly above the age of 80 years is increasing. This is positive, but it also means that the challenges related to undernutrition in the elderly will not disappear – on the contrary. That is why it is positive that we focus on the challenge and that we do it together. It is a complex problem demanding more solutions”, says Chairman of the Regional Council in Central Denmark Region, Anders Kühnau, who will open the conference at Aarhus University tomorrow.



Facts

- The article "Undernutrition in older people" is made by support from the European Commission. Read it at: www.smr-conference.dk/siteassets/abstracts---topics/undernutrition.pdf
- The conference "Undernutrition in elderly citizens" on the 29 October 2019 at Aarhus University is organised by Central Denmark Region, Aarhus Municipality, Aarhus University and the Central Denmark Region EU office (CDEU)
- Read more about the conference supported by the EU Commission concept "Science Meets Regions": www.smr-conference.dk
- Numbers from Statistics Denmark show that there are 265,000 people above the age of 80 years in Denmark today. In 2025, this number will be 344,000
- Numbers for the OECD show that Danes on average live four years longer after the turn of the millennium. On average, a Danish woman can expect to be 83.1 years old and a Danish man can expect to be 79.2 years old
- It is estimated that the consequences of undernutrition such as an increased need for home care, hospital admissions etc. amount to approximately DKK 6 billion annually
- The conference is financed by: Joint Research Centre, European Commission

Further information

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