



bulletin board

Prevention must be a priority

The future of NHS funding is hanging in the balance and, so far, the options on the table are all pretty unappealing. We all know cost pressures are increasing, with an ageing population and the rising costs of new drugs to tackle existing disease. The Government recently announced an extra £20 billion a year in funding by 2023, but it still needs to make efficiency savings to balance the books. Proposals include cutting 17 types of operations deemed to be 'unnecessary procedures'. Even so, a recent Institute of Fiscal Studies report found that the only way to truly meet future cost demands would be through 'substantial tax rises'. So, faced with cuts or taxes, is there a third way?

I would argue that natural health, with its roots in prevention, nutrition and lifestyle, has to be the answer and must become a priority in any future strategy. In other words, to paraphrase our dear friend Ray Hill of the Health Food Institute: "The official policy has been to put an ambulance at the bottom of the cliff – is it not time to build a fence at the top?"



Robert Taylor
is chair of the HFMA and senior vice president of Vitabiotics

The Micronutrients and Health All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG), the Secretariat for which is managed by the HFMA, was held on 3 July, specifically to explore this topic of 'Healthcare Cost Savings from Food Supplements'. Nutritionist Dr Michele Sadler showed that the economic burden of poor diets in the UK is an estimated £5.8 billion – much higher than smoking or alcohol, estimated at £3.3 billion each. Just one example of the astonishing long-term health care cost savings is giving vitamin D supplements to older people. This can help prevent falls, potentially saving the NHS more than £2 billion a year.

Following this, Mark Monahan, a research fellow in the Health Economics Unit, University of Birmingham, shared an analysis of the benefits of iodine supple-

mentation for pregnant women. Based on research indicating that iodine supplementation could potentially increase a child's IQ by 1.22 points, his department's published research has shown potential cost savings to the NHS of £199 and to society of £4,476 per pregnant woman, in addition to the obvious human and societal benefits of better health, including improved birth outcomes and higher infant IQ, with benefits spanning a whole lifetime.

So prevention needs to be top of the agenda at the very highest level in Government, and I recently had the opportunity to ask the Chancellor Phillip Hammond about these issues.

Convincing those in power is not easy, but there is no doubt that nutritional measures could result in hugely significant healthcare cost savings for the NHS. We need to start building that fence.

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News ...

The B12 deficit

A topic that has been particularly prevalent in the HFMA's daily 'In the News' bulletin updates recently, is vitamin B12.

With more and more people choosing to follow vegetarian, vegan and/or dairy-free diets, cases of deficiency in vitamin B12 – which is found primarily in meat, fish and dairy products – is on the rise. Recent statistics suggest 11% of vegans are vitamin B12 deficient, compared to around 6% of non-vegans. This essential vitamin is vital for maintaining a healthy immune system, a healthy nervous system, and for converting food into energy. Current Government guidelines recommend 1.5 micrograms a day for adults; roughly the equivalent of a 3oz sirloin steak, or half a can of tuna.

OMEGA-3 LINKED TO GOOD BEHAVIOUR IN CHILDREN

A recent study conducted by the University of Massachusetts has revealed that youngsters who take omega-3 supplements every day are 'less likely to disobey instructions, steal, or damage property'. The study, conducted on 200 children over six months, involved their parents reporting on their behaviour at the beginning of

the trial, at the end of the trial, and again a further 24 weeks after its conclusion. The findings were published in the *Journal of Aggressive Behaviour*.

Lead author Professor Jill Portnoy commented that: "Omega-3 fatty acids are thought to improve brain health in children and adults. There is more to be learned about

the benefits, but if we can improve people's brain health and behaviour in the process, that's a really big plus."

The findings add to the considerable archive of evidence supporting the efficacy of omega-3 supplements for a range of conditions and behaviour areas, and it's great to see this kind of research being conducted.