

Putting nutrition at the heart of patient care

An Update on Specialist Nutrition

Specialist nutrition helps people to be healthy, survive and thrive at every stage of their lives. It supports positive health outcomes and reduces costs to the NHS.

WHO Guidance on food for infants and young children

The World Health Organisation (WHO) has released a Guidance entitled: *Ending the Inappropriate Promotion of Foods for Infants and Young Children*.

BSNA and the infant nutrition industry share the same goals that are envisaged by the WHO Guidance – to protect breastfeeding, reduce the risk of obesity and chronic diseases and to promote a healthy diet for infants and young children. However, we believe that in order to achieve this goal, informed choice on the best possible nutrition options for breastfed and non-breastfed infants, as well as young children in the early years of life, is essential for parents, caregivers and healthcare professionals (HCPs).

We are concerned that in its current form, the WHO Guidance may result in unintended health consequences for infants and young children. For example, if implemented, the Guidance could limit access to information, which is key to enabling all caregivers and HCPs to make optimal feeding choices for their infants and young children. BSNA firmly believes that HCPs, mothers and other caregivers should have access to more – not less – accurate information, and that the absence of such information could lead to unintended health consequences. Infant foods are produced to the highest food safety and regulatory standards and meet the nutritional requirements of some of the most vulnerable people in society. Restricting information on products covered by the Guidance could lead parents to feed their young children foods that are either not suitable for their age or that are high in salt, fat and sugar.

Furthermore, restricting the ability of companies to market their products with identifiable trademarks also limits the ability of parents and caregivers to choose trusted brands and may undermine consumer confidence in an environment in which the consumer expects products to be consistent and recognisable.

We also firmly believe that it is crucial for the WHO Guidance and Codex Standards to be aligned in order to ensure that the Guidance is properly implemented by Member States.

Restrictions of ONS and gluten-free foods

We applaud the sentiments expressed by Anne Holdoway in her Dietetic Comment column, published in the May issue of CN. Restrictions on specialist foods, including gluten-free foods and oral nutritional supplements (ONS), are of significant concern and are likely to impact patients' long-term health outcomes. We believe that these foods should be available on prescription to all patients who need them and recognised as an integral part of the management of conditions which require nutritional support. Dietitians are well placed to evaluate when, and for how long, patients require specialist foods and will, we hope, speak up for patient-centred care. For more information see: www.bsna.co.uk/categories/medical_foods

Training options available for parenteral nutrition

BSNA carried out a survey to assess HCPs' perception of parenteral nutrition (PN), the results of which were highlighted in the November 2015 issue of CN. A key finding of the survey was that the availability of formal PN training, the way in which it is delivered, and knowledge of PN among HCPs, is inconsistent across Trusts. We found that a fifth of HCPs reported that their Trust did not provide PN training. In addition, HCPs called for training to be delivered through online tutorials, practical courses and detailed guidance. Increasing HCPs' knowledge and understanding of PN will ensure that it is used appropriately. A list of training courses is available on our website. For more information see: www.bsna.co.uk/categories/parenteral_nutrition/trainingdates.

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 and complementary weaning foods), medical nutrition products for diagnosed disorders and medical conditions, including parenteral nutrition, and gluten-free foods. www.bsna.co.uk