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**ISSUED ON BEHALF OF THE BRITISH SOCIETY OF GASTROENTEROLOGY**

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### **NHS PATIENTS ‘RISK COMPLICATIONS AND DEATH’ BECAUSE OF POOR NUTRITION IN HOSPITALS**

Hundreds of thousands of patients admitted to NHS hospitals lose weight when they enter hospital, slowing down recovery, increasing the risk of infections and complications, and increasing the risk that they will die from their condition, the Annual Scientific Meeting of the British Society of Gastroenterology (BSG) was told today.

Dr Barry Jones, Chairman of the BSG’s Nutrition Committee, and a consultant Gastroenterologist at Russells Hall Hospital in the West Midlands said: “Two thirds of patients admitted to an NHS hospital lose weight during their hospital stay. If they are already malnourished, three quarters will lose weight. We are talking about tens or hundreds of thousands of patients. Many ill patients admitted to hospital are malnourished and need careful nutritional support. At its simplest, this may be encouraging patients to eat more but all too often an artificial tube has to be given.”

He called on doctors and nurses to ‘think nutrition’ - to look at patients and to weigh them.

“Most patients with malnutrition go unnoticed. Doctors are pretty awful at taking nutritional histories from patients so they can tell if they need nutritional help. There is a widespread failure to weigh patients, and a failure to “think nutrition” at all. It’s usually regarded as someone else’s problem.”

“This is not rocket science. Doctors and nurses need to look at patients, ask them about their nutritional history, weigh them and do something about it if they lose weight in hospital.”

He warned that measures recently recommended by the National Institute of Clinical Excellence to address the NHS’s inadequate approach to patient nutrition were under threat from the funding crisis currently afflicting the NHS.

“The recommendations from NICE are a good first step, but they need to be put into practice. That will require a great deal of funding, as only about half of all

hospitals currently have multi-disciplinary nutrition teams and specialist nutrition nurses.”

“I am worried that the current NHS cash crisis will mean these life-saving changes – which should have been happening anyway – will not be put into practice.”

Only 55% of hospitals had a multi-disciplinary nutritional team in place to ensure patients are well-nourished in hospital. “And away from the big teaching hospitals just over one in three hospitals (38%) has an established nutritional team. That is not enough. Without a nutritional team, we cannot hope to ensure our patients leave hospital better nourished than they come in.”

“And it is cost-effective to have a nutrition team in place because good nutrition speeds recovery and prevents infections, including bed sores and encourages wound healing. Delays in wound healing cost the NHS millions, because of the need for a prolonged hospital stay.”

He added that there were just 180 nutrition nurse specialists in the UK, when there should be one in every hospital in the UK.

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