



5pm, 25<sup>th</sup> October, 2011

## **Vitamin D: Sunlight, Diet, Supplements - Who gets enough?**

Vitamin D is essential for maintaining strong and healthy bones and preventing diseases like rickets and osteoporosis yet 74.5% of the population has a vitamin D intake below the recommended level. At particular risk are children and the elderly but despite the Department of Health having clear recommendations for vitamin D supplementation for both of these groups, there is little evidence that these guidelines are being followed.

Chair of a parliamentary event held today, Yasmin Qureshi MP, commented: "I am delighted to take this agenda into parliament and I would urge my fellow MPs to champion vitamin D supplementation and implementation of the existing guidelines with their primary care organisations at a constituency level. This is an important public health issue with 74.5% of the population having a vitamin D intake below the Reference Nutrient Intake of 5 micrograms a day."

To address how awareness can be raised of the importance of vitamin D in maintaining healthy bones and preventing illness, a discussion took place between MPs, healthcare professionals, industry and other health and nutrition experts.

Ms Qureshi added: "The experiences shared today have clearly demonstrated that the vitamin D guidelines are confusing, for example, a patient treated with chemotherapy which lead to bone loss and osteoporosis was not told about or prescribed vitamin D. We are calling on the Future Forum to make sure the Public Health Outcomes Framework is not set in stone and is able to take into account the latest scientific advances so that it can evolve to meet future challenges."

Keynote speaker, Claire Severgnini, CEO of the National Osteoporosis Society, opened the discussion: "Vitamin D is vital for bone health as it helps the body absorb calcium; the best source is safe exposure to sunlight. You should be able to get enough vitamin D by enjoying an active, outdoors lifestyle during the summer months. Currently, the Department of Health recommends that vitamin D supplementation is offered to all vulnerable groups including children under the age of five, pregnant women, breast-feeding mothers and people over the age of 65."

Dr Gill Jenkins, GP, commented: "A greater emphasis on nutritional issues should be incorporated into doctors' training. Awareness of the guidelines also needs to be



promoted in general practice, with advice for GPs on how to identify vitamin D deficiency, who is most at risk and when it is appropriate for a supplement to be prescribed.”

Lynn Young from the Royal College of Nursing spoke about the importance of the guidelines in relation to pregnant and lactating women and children: “Over the past few years we have been seeing cases of rickets re-emerging amongst children, which is a direct result of vitamin D deficiency. Practice nurses, health visitors and midwives are well-placed to advise pregnant women and mothers of young children on the recommendations and their awareness of the guidelines is something that we plan to look at.”

Ash Soni, pharmacist and member of the NHS Future Forum said: “Community pharmacists and those who are involved with pharmacy services for care homes have a pivotal role in raising awareness of potential vitamin D deficiency and advocating supplementation, in line with the government’s own advice. We need to make sure that this message gets through to the profession.”

Mr Soni will be taking the issues raised at the meeting and feeding them back to the NHS Future Forum.

**-ENDS-**

**Notes to editors:**

PAGB is the UK trade association for manufacturers of branded over-the-counter (OTC) medicines and food supplements. PAGB was founded in 1919 with the aim of 'promoting responsible consumer healthcare'.

For further information, or if you would like an image of the map showing UK population with intake of vitamin D below the Reference Nutrient Intake by constituency, please contact Claire Weaver, Communications Officer at [claire.weaver@pagb.co.uk](mailto:claire.weaver@pagb.co.uk) or on 020 7421 9319.