
Malnutrition in the Sick and Elderly



A review article by researchers from Uppsala University and the University of Gothenburg, published in the New England Journal of Medicine, underscores that up to half of hospitalised patients and those in healthcare facilities suffer from malnutrition. This has significant implications, including unnecessary suffering, decreased quality of life, and increased mortality, particularly for elderly patients. Despite the potential to alleviate these issues through nutritional interventions, the article highlights the lack of attention to this problem.

Study researchers highlight underdiagnosis and undertreatment of malnutrition as pervasive issues in global healthcare, affecting not only Sweden but also worldwide. They emphasise that straightforward methods could greatly improve the well-being of patients and older adults.

The article reviews advancements in understanding malnutrition over the past 50 years, particularly in the last five years, stressing the urgent need for the healthcare sector to integrate this knowledge into practice more effectively. In Sweden, it's estimated that 5 to 10% of older adults and up to 50% of hospitalised patients suffer from malnutrition, often attributed incorrectly to natural disease progression or ageing rather than treatable underlying causes.

Malnutrition, primarily caused by disease-related appetite loss, leads to weight loss, muscle wasting, increased susceptibility to infections, and higher mortality rates. Recent clinical studies affirm that malnutrition can be reversed through counselling, dietitian-guided treatment, and nutritional supplementation.

The researchers advocate for early identification of malnutrition risk factors, monitoring weight loss and appetite changes, promoting nutrient-rich diets, and initiating nutritional therapy promptly, including the use of nutritional supplements. They stress the importance of incorporating this knowledge into medical and nursing training worldwide to improve patient care comprehensively.

Source: [Uppsala University](#)

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