

Hidden Hunger and Malnutrition in the Elderly

A report was published on Monday 22nd January 2018 by a cross-party group of Members of Parliament and Peers who serve as officers on the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Hunger.

Six pieces of evidence, taken from the above report, in particular, illustrated the severity of the phenomenon, with which we are now confronted:

1. One woman in her eighties with dreadful rheumatoid arthritis, had been caring for her husband with dementia and leg ulcers. The district nurses came in every two or three days to dress his leg, administer his medication, and provide all the support he needed. The care going to him helped his wife as well. He eventually went into a care home, but nobody thought about how his wife was coping with her rheumatoid arthritis in her eighties. It was nine weeks later when her neighbour, who had grown concerned over her wellbeing, took in some milk and found she had not eaten a meal for nine weeks.
2. One woman weighed six stone and 'probably wasn't long for this earth' when she was referred to the Hertfordshire Independent Living Service. The Service told us in oral evidence that it has encountered older people, 'literally fading away in their own homes'.
3. Some older people being helped by 'FoodCycle' are eating multiple portions of food after they arrive at the organisation's communal meal clubs. They are 'thin and look malnourished – and it is obvious from the speed at which they eat the food they are very hungry'.
4. Up to half the older people living alone who receive meals from the Hertfordshire Independent Living Service, needed to rely upon the Service for a meal on Christmas Day because they would not receive a visit from anybody else.
5. Pensioners who would normally keep the heating or lights off to save money, are turning them on only when they know that people are due to visit the house. One Meals on Wheels volunteer shared the example of an older man who would switch off the lights on his Christmas tree as soon as the team left the house, to save on his electricity.
6. One man in his nineties, now receiving help from The Food Train, had not been able to buy food as his local supermarket banned him. He had had two falls and they said he was too much of a threat to their liability insurance.