

Dear Mr Hunt

We are writing to you prior to the G8 Summit meetings planned to discuss the global social and economic challenge of Dementia this December.

We very much support your intention to help people manage Dementia better, lead healthier lives and deliver real improvements in care, initiatives that will also deliver substantial economic savings due to the estimated cost burden of \$420 Billion per annum to Western economies.

Whilst we support efforts to promote research and development in medical treatments of the disease, **we believe that hitherto there has been insufficient emphasis on the role of diet and lifestyle** - factors which have been shown to be associated with a dramatically reduced risk of developing dementia. In particular, **a Mediterranean-style diet is pre-eminent** in preventing and slowing the progression of Dementia, as highlighted in a 2012 Policy Brief by Alzheimer's Disease International and by numerous high quality epidemiological studies both in the UK and overseas. For example:

- a 20 year MRC study found that higher adherence of a British cohort to a Mediterranean-style diet in early midlife is protective of cognitive (verbal memory) decline from mid to later life, independent of other lifestyle factors such as smoking or physical activity¹.
- a 2013 systematic review from the University of Exeter Medical School concluded that greater adherence to Mediterranean diet is associated with slower cognitive decline and lower risk of developing Alzheimer's disease².

Adopting a policy that incorporates a Mediterranean-style diet also helps address the current widespread resistance from the medical profession to the political drive to screen for pre-dementia³, a situation that has arisen because (a) studies do not support the use of cognitive enhancers for mild cognitive impairment⁴ and (b) of concerns regarding patients' insurance status, the social stigma of an early diagnosis etc.

Prescribing a Mediterranean-style diet avoids many of these issues. And it is ideally placed to be recommended as part of the NHS Health Checks programme as it can also help manage multiple co-morbidities - not only common amongst patients with pre-dementia, but also an area of more broad concern.

The large body of evidence demonstrating the efficacy of a Mediterranean-style diet for dementia (and other chronic diseases) has not unfortunately been matched by the development of the means to implement it, due in part to the low awareness and prestige given to diet by many in the medical profession. Hence, a Mediterranean-style diet - possibly the best strategy currently available for tackling dementia - is being largely ignored. Also, with the Annual Household Survey in the UK, and similar surveys in other European countries, reporting reductions in spend on fruit and vegetables and the failure of most people to consume at least five portions of fruit or vegetables a day, we feel it is imperative to consider further action to educate professionals and the public in the importance of diet and lifestyle in preventing the onset of dementia.

Dementia is a global problem and the adoption of less healthy patterns of eating in Southern European countries, despite the recognition of the traditional Mediterranean Diet by UNESCO as an Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, is a matter of great concern.

It is widely acknowledged that a relatively small percentage as a proportion of total health service spend is specifically ring fenced for health promotion activity. We hope this crisis in dementia can be seen as an opportunity to lead to real policy change, namely towards a Mediterranean diet rather than towards the more dubious benefit of most drugs. We therefore call upon the outcome of the proposed G8 meetings concerning Dementia to recognise the preventative role of the Mediterranean diet, and urge Governments and other agencies to develop and adopt a strategic approach which integrates the scientific knowledge, which has demonstrated such a compelling case, and to include this in opportunities to reduce the incidence of Dementia.

Yours

Dr Simon Poole, GP; Dr Richard Hoffman (University of Hertfordshire); Dr Aseem Malhotra (Cardiologist); Simon Capewell, Professor of clinical epidemiology University of Liverpool, Professor David Haslam, Chair National Obesity Forum (UK) Professor Clare Gerada, (Former Chair Royal College of General Practitioners) Dr Mariette Gerber (former President French Nutrition Society); Dr Antonia Trichopoulou (Director of the WHO Collaborating Center for Nutrition at the Department of Hygiene and Epidemiology, School of Medicine, University of Athens); Sara Baer-Sinnott (President Oldways Association, US); Prof Walter Willett (Fredrick John Stare Professor of Epidemiology and Nutrition, Harvard School of Public Health); Dr Francesco Sofi, (University of Florence, Italy),

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2. Lourida I, Soni M, Thompson-Coon J, et al. Mediterranean diet, cognitive function, and dementia: a systematic review. *Epidemiology*. 2013;24(4):479-489.
3. Le Couteur DG, Doust J, Creasey H, Brayne C. Political drive to screen for pre-dementia: not evidence based and ignores the harms of diagnosis. *Bmj*. 2013;347:f5125.
4. Tricco AC, Soobiah C, Berliner S, et al. Efficacy and safety of cognitive enhancers for patients with mild cognitive impairment: a systematic review and meta-analysis. *CMAJ*. 2013.