The Prague Declaration:
A call for action to fight malnutrition in Europe

10 September 2007

Four out of ten hospitalized patients in Europe are malnourished, and figures for community settings are equally alarming (Pichard 2005, Wait 2005). Malnutrition is a heavy burden for many in society, leading to increased mortality, longer hospital stays, increased complications and decreased quality of life for patients (Nice 2005, Pirlich 2003).

Consequently malnutrition costs billions of Euros every year to cover those extra hospital days and associated complications. Interventions to ensure appropriate nutritional care would be highly cost-effective (Elia et al, 2005), and measures against malnutrition will amortise within one fiscal year. Even poorly-equipped and over-stretched health systems could afford to act upon it, just by making mandatory early screening for malnutrition and appropriated treatment whenever required.

Too often nutrition strategies concentrate on the problem of over-nutrition (i.e. obesity and overweight) rather than focusing on achieving a balanced intake to ensure wellnutrition. As an example, national and EU policy agendas do not reflect the importance and urgency of detection of malnutrition in Europe.

Whilst a few countries and institutions have made some progress in establishing systems and policies to prevent malnutrition, this is still a complex issue that remains poorly understood and considered of little relevance to most European countries. Solutions do exist that would reduce healthcare expenditures and most importantly improve the quality of care and clinical outcomes. However, these solutions are not currently being implemented, although they were part of the Council of Europe declaration made in November 2003.

Against this background, the European Society for Clinical Nutrition and Metabolism (ESPEN), the European Nutrition for Health Alliance (ENHA), the Medical Nutrition International Industries (MNI) and the members and partners of these organizations have joined forces to fight malnutrition in Europe. This alliance is dedicated to propose and implement changes and to raise awareness from the most relevant healthcare stakeholders, including physicians, healthcare managers, insurers, industry, and advocacy institutions.

We, the undersigned, therefore call on the EU institutions – the European Parliament, the European Commission and the European Council of Ministers – as well as on national governments, providers of health services and other relevant bodies to:

- **Acknowledge** that malnutrition and obesity are both results of poor nutrition with significant consequences for health outcomes and healthcare expenditures;
- **Recognize** malnutrition as a distinct pathology and its nutritional support as an integral part of each medical treatment;
- **Affirm** that access to proper nutritional care and support is a fundamental human right;
- **Offer** political direction and support for all stakeholders involved in the fight against malnutrition;
- **Provide** coherent reimbursement policy for nutritional support across health and social care systems;
- **Develop** nutrition care plans for all healthcare settings and promote the implementation of existing solutions to fight malnutrition for the benefit of patients, healthcare systems and society.

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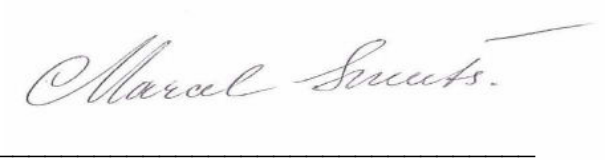
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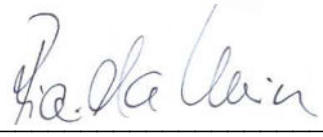
Michel Gardet, President
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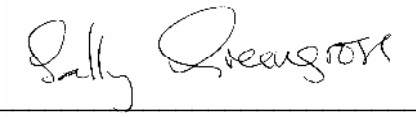
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