

Hungry For Change

Raising public and political awareness of malnutrition in the UK

An initiative from the Infant and Dietetic Foods Association Ltd (IDFA) and the British Association of Parenteral and Enteral Nutrition (BAPEN)

Rationale

At least two million people in the UK are malnourished. More than one in four patients admitted to hospital are at risk of malnutrition and it is estimated that malnutrition costs the UK's national health service £7.3 billion every year – double the cost of obesity.

Malnutrition continues to be a hidden condition and despite the scale of the burden, awareness of it is low.

IDFA and BAPEN have worked in partnership with a strategy to increase political and media scrutiny of malnutrition issues in the UK. Focussing on parliamentarians and policy-makers we have worked to:

1. Raise awareness and improve understanding of malnutrition
2. Encourage better collection and publication of data on malnutrition
3. Harness policy levers to promote better screening for, and management of, malnutrition

Methods

We identified and met with politicians, civil servants and organisations likely to be interested in malnutrition. Many had limited knowledge of malnutrition and were surprised to realise that around 3,000 people could be suffering from malnutrition in the average parliamentary constituency. By making the problem relevant to parliamentarians' constituents, we successfully captured their interest and turned them into advocates for our cause.

Politicians ask parliamentary questions (PQs) or raised the subject of malnutrition in relevant health debates to encourage increased political attention. A strong relationship was developed with the Opposition health team, whose PQs unlocked new information about hospital admission and discharge figures – used to secure national and regional press stories. A debate on management of malnutrition was secured in the House of Lords.

IDFA supported BAPEN in bringing together a group of cross-discipline experts, which met in June 2008 to analyse the social, personal and economic burden of malnutrition and discuss the impact and effectiveness of current policy initiatives. The group's policy recommendations will be captured in a 'state of the nation' report, which will be launched at a parliamentary reception, generating more media and political interest and extending opportunities for stakeholder engagement.



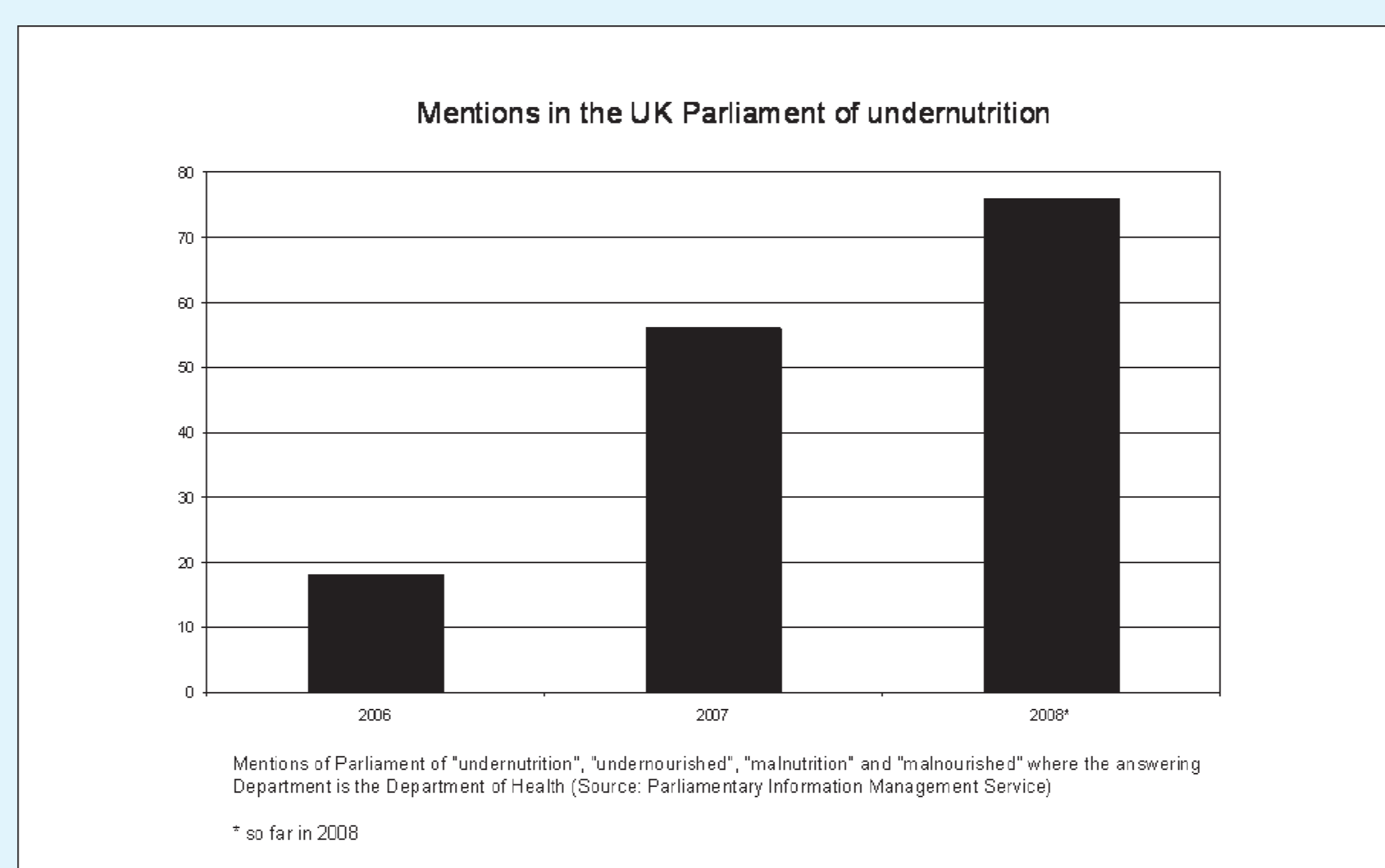
We have seized opportunities to embed malnutrition in national health policy. A Health and Social Care Bill was recently introduced to Parliament to set up a new regulator to monitor health and social care. Following our briefing, Opposition parties tabled amendments to the Bill to make malnutrition a core regulated activity, securing a commitment from Health Minister, Ben Bradshaw: *"Members and outside bodies who have argued that nutrition, food, and the way in which they are delivered should be included in the core requirements to continue to do so, as they will be pushing at an open door."*

We have also submitted policy ideas to public consultations, including the Health Select Committee Inquiry on health inequalities; the Scottish Executive's consultation, *Better Health, Better Care*; the Department of Health's *Nutrition Action Plan*; and Lord Darzi's *NHS Next Stage Review*.

Results

Quantitative and qualitative success measures include:

- **90 politicians** written to and provided with a briefing about malnutrition
- **13 meetings** with influential politicians on the subject of malnutrition
- **70 parliamentary mentions** in the past six months, a **four-fold increase** over the yearly total for 2006
- Media coverage generating more than **30 million opportunities** to see the campaign's key messages
- Creation of a **new policy expert group** as commentators on the issue



through a management committee. IDFA members have provided company experts for face-to-face meetings with stakeholders. Estimated time spent per annum would approach 1,000 hours of company, agency and IDFA resource.

Discussion & Conclusions

IDFA and BAPEN are delighted that the partnership – through its innovative parliamentary focus – has been successful in bringing malnutrition to the attention of the public through the media, securing influential advocates and gaining political recognition of the need to do more to tackle the condition. We believe that parliamentary-focussed approaches could deliver similar wins in other countries.

We now intend to:

1. Publish the report from the expert group, generating further opportunities to debate malnutrition issues and supportive policy
2. Improve care standards by securing malnutrition as part of the new regulator's core activities
3. Encourage primary care incentives for better screening for and management of undernutrition
4. Influence the parties' manifestos as the UK prepares for a general election

Contact Details

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