Source: PA International's campaign on raising Vitamin D awareness

As well as new events relating to Vitamin D, in this issue we highlight:
the European Commission's responses to Parliamentary Questions on the issue of Vitamin D and Vitamin D deficiency;

the outcomes of the Scottish Summit on Vitamin D and Multiple Sclerosis, and a related awareness-raising initiative by the Scottish Government; new clinical practice recommendations for Vitamin D deficiency; a report linking increased Vitamin D (through sun exposure) and a reduced risk of cancer; and the return of 'rickets' to London.

NEWS

Responses by the European Commission to Parliamentary Questions on Vitamin D submitted by the European Parliament

The European Commission has responded to the three Parliamentary Questions submitted in September by Mr. Jim Higgins, Member of the European Parliament. The questions, as reported in last month's Newsletter, were focused on the activities of the Commission in relation to Vitamin D and Vitamin D deficiency.

In response to a request for an update on the work and research of the European Micronutrient Recommendations Aligned Network (EURRECA), and the extent to which EFSA will draw on the recommendations on Vitamin D being prepared by the Institute of Medicine in the US, the

Commission has asked EFSA, who provided the following information:

- Work on the Dietary Reference Values (DRVs) for micronutrients including Vitamin D will only commence at the end of 2010
- EFSA carefully monitors all available scientific opinion from authoritative bodies, including from the Institute of Medicine in the USA, which EFSA views as being of high value for its work on setting Vitamin D DRVs.
- EFSA stated that it cooperates with EURRECA to prevent duplication of the work they both undertake, and to ensure that EURRECA's work is complementary and supportive to EFSA.

In response to a request for information on how and to what extent the European Commission could support further research into the potential benefits of Vitamin D for several serious illnesses, the Commission highlighted a number of recent and current research projects:

1. The establishment of EURRECA, following the 6th Framework Programme for Research and Technological Development (FP6), which is tasked with developing a framework for harmonised advice on micronutrients, including Vitamin D.
2. Two projects, as part of the 7th Framework Programme for Research and Technological Development (FP7), aiming to establish the role of Vitamin D as a preventive measure against gestational diabetes development; and assessing the immune-modulation properties of Vitamin D with a view to developing novel immunotherapy strategies preventing the destruction of pancreatic cells (the natural immunomodulators as novel immunotherapies for type 1 diabetes (NAIMIT) project and Vitamin D and Lifestyle Intervention for Gestational Diabetes Mellitus (GDM) Prevention (DALI) project respectively).
3. The project regarding Mechanisms of early protective exposures on allergy development (EFRAIM), also under FP7, will evaluate the role of Vitamin D status in relation to the development of allergic diseases in five birth cohorts from Austria, Finland, France, Germany and Switzerland.

In response to MEP Higgins' request for information on the use of the latest scientific research is incorporated into the European Commission's evaluation of the impact of Vitamin D deficiency, the Commission stated that it does not perform economic impact analyses related to Vitamin D status. The European Commission did not comment when asked of the potential role of the European Parliament in this process.

Scottish Summit on Vitamin D and Multiple Sclerosis

The Deputy First Minister of Scotland, Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing, Nicola Sturgeon MSP, delivered the keynote address to the recent high level Scottish Summit on Vitamin D and Multiple Sclerosis that took place in Glasgow on 21 September. The meeting brought together researchers, patients and policy makers for a discussion on public health policy in Scotland. Also speaking at the event were Professor George Ebers of the Wellcome Trust Centre for Human Genetics, Ryan McLaughlin of Shine on Scotland, and internationally renowned scientists from Australia, Canada and the US. Closing the conference Professor Ebers suggested that supplements should be introduced to Scotland in order to see if they can help prevent MS, which would cost under £5 per person a year. The summit coincided with the announcement of a new awareness-raising initiative by the Scottish Government on the dangers of Vitamin D deficiency in Scotland. Leaflets produced by the National Health Service (NHS) Scotland were issued in September to all doctors and health professionals. The campaign focuses in particular on at-risk groups: pregnant and breastfeeding women, children under five, adults aged over 65, the housebound and people with darker skin. Shine on Scotland was applauded by all for the continued effort it has made to keep the issue on the agenda – this is even more amazing given the limited resources available. The McLaughlin family intend to create a charitable foundation to continue this important work and support is welcomed – they can be contacted at http://www.shineonscotland.org.uk .

New Recommendations for clinical practice and Vitamin D

A panel of 25 experts on Vitamin D from various fields, including cardiology, autoimmunity and cancer, recently met to set out Vitamin D recommendations for clinical practice concerning adult patients with or at risk of fractures, falls, cardiovascular or autoimmune disease and cancer. The report, published in Autoimmunity Reviews [Volume 9, Issue 11, September 2010, Pages 709-715], recommended that the 25(OH)D (the blood calcidiol level) level in the identified risk groups (above) should be above 30 nanograms per millilitre (ng/mL). The expert panel agreed on an upper safe limit for 25(OH)D of 100ng/mL. It was recommended that in Vitamin D deficient patients, a treatment of 20ng/mL/day was proposed.

New recommendations and report from the Dutch Cancer Society

The Dutch Cancer Society has recently released a report which outlines the potential benefits of sun exposure and Vitamin D for a number of serious illnesses. The report, entitled *De relatie tussen kanker, zonnestraling en Vitamine D*
, advises daily exposure of the head and hands to the sun for about 15-30 minutes during the early afternoon, in order to maintain a healthy level of Vitamin D. Furthermore, the report states as “plausible” the beneficial effects of sun exposure (as the main source of Vitamin D) as a risk-reducing factor in cancer of the colon, prostate and breast and non-Hodgkin lymphoma, as well as reduced mortality in cases of colon, prostate and breast cancer. Overall, the report stated as “probable” that the production of Vitamin D plays a role in the risk reduction of several types of cancer, and having the strongest link to a reduction in colon, prostate and breast and non-Hodgkin lymphoma.

“Rickets making a comeback in London”

A report by the BBC has highlighted the growing problem of Vitamin D deficiency and the rise of rickets in children in London. According to the news report, the health services in London are now reporting hundreds of cases a year of rickets in children. For example London’s Somali community has reported instances of Vitamin D levels as low as a tenth of those recommended. Pharmacists and health workers have stated that one of the main problems is the sourcing of sufficient and sufficiently effective Vitamin D treatments, and the Department of Health are now said to be actively looking for partners to assist in providing the necessary supplies of Vitamin D.