**National Salt Awareness Week 2006 – House of Common Reception**

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| On the 1st February a lunchtime reception was held at the House of Commons, between 12.15 and 3pm. There were around 120 guests including representatives from retailers, food manufacturers, caterers, charities, MPs, Department of Health (DH), the Food Standards Agency (FSA), media and other stakeholders. **Presentations** Margaret Moran, MP for Luton South and sponsor of the event introduced the speakers who included: Professor Graham MacGregor, Chairman of CASH Ms Diane Abbott MP for Hackney North and Stoke Newington Dame Deirdre Hutton, Chairman of the Food Standards Agency (FSA) Ms Caroline Flint, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Public Health Ms Margaret Moran C:\Users\carrie\Desktop\Example\Salt Awareness Week\Landing Page\2006 Salt and Ethnic Groups\saw_2006_evaluation_clip_image002.jpgBefore introducing all speakers, Ms Moran opened the event by highlighting that salt and raised blood pressure was an issue close to her heart, due to the high proportion of South Asian people (from Pakistan, Bangladesh, Kashmir) and African Caribbean people in her constituency affected by the consequences of raised blood pressure, namely strokes, heart attacks and heart disease. Thus, the emphasis of the CASH campaign on prevention rather than cure was most welcomed by Ms Moran. 'For the general population, 80% of salt intake is from processed foods. However, processed foods are not the main source of salt intake for these ethnic groups. The main source of salt consumption is from salt added during cooking or at the table, so a different educational strategy needs to be adopted to help these groups reduce their salt intake. I am very concerned by the number of young black and South Asian people who are in our local hospitals with strokes and heart disease, so the message about reducing salt intake needs to be reinforced.' Professor Graham MacGregor C:\Users\carrie\Desktop\Example\Salt Awareness Week\Landing Page\2006 Salt and Ethnic Groups\saw_2006_evaluation_clip_image003.jpgProfessor MacGregor highlighted how things have moved on since CASH was launched 10 years ago, 'In those days we had secret meetings with the Department of Health about the issues of salt but now I am delighted to see how things have moved on, with salt now being on the government's health agenda'. Professor MacGregor spoke about how important it was for everyone to reduce their salt intake, 'If we reduce our salt intake from the current average of between 10-12g per day to less than 6g per day for adults we will save 70,000 people from having a stroke or a heart attack, 35,000 of which will be fatal'. Professor MacGregor also emphasized that ethnic minority groups, including African Caribbean and South Asian needed specific targeting to drive the message that salt is harmful to health due to increased incidence of strokes, heart disease and heart attacks in these populations. Professor MacGregor also went on to say that the African Caribbean population is more sensitive to the effects of salt, resulting in more raised blood pressure compared with the rest of the population. 'Culturally a lot of foods eaten by these ethnic minority groups, especially the African Caribbean population, are salty. If I were black I would get my blood pressure tested immediately and refuse to touch that white chemical called salt.' Professor Graham MacGregor thanked everybody who supported the Week, including Margaret Moran for sponsoring the event at the House of Commons, Trading Standards officers for their help in analyzing the Indian and Chinese takeaway meals, the Food Standards Agency, British Heart Foundation, Race for Health, Asda, M&S, Tesco, Waitrose and Bird's Eye for their unrestricted grants that they provided towards the Week. Ms Diane Abbott Ms Abbott opened her talk by saying how pleased she was to be asked to speak about the salt and hypertension issue. Ms Abbott said that when she was growing up raised blood pressure was something she thought affected everyone in the black community as they got older, but she now realised that clearly this need not be the case. Ms Abbott explained that salty foods such as salted fish are part of the African Caribbean diet based on historical reasons: during slavery times when fish was brought in by the slave traders from Newfoundland it was preserved in salt. However, now these foods are eaten out of habit and tradition. 'I hope there will be events in the black community to help people to prepare their favourite recipes without adding so much salt.' Dame Deirdre Hutton C:\Users\carrie\Desktop\Example\Salt Awareness Week\Landing Page\2006 Salt and Ethnic Groups\saw_2006_evaluation_clip_image004.jpgDame Deirdre began by stating that real progress on awareness of the dangers of salt had been made in the past year. Dame Deirdre applauded the food retailers and manufacturers for their efforts on reducing salt to date, highlighting the latest M&S's advert, "We're reducing salt in our food faster than you can say 'sodium chloride" - as one of several examples. Dame Deirdre also highlighted that the FSA are in close dialogue with the industry with regards to improving labelling, although she pointed out that a consensus has not yet been reached. One success story with industry included Sainsbury's for already achieving the 2010 salt targets for standard sliced breads. Dame Deirdre said that the FSA would continue to work closely with the food companies and industry bodies to ensure as far as possible that the 6g target is reached by 2010. Dame Deirdre went on to state the importance of partnerships to the second phase of the campaign. Dame Deirdre stated that the two phases of FSA campaigns had succeeded in increasing public awareness about the dangers of eating too much salt, and that the second phase had raised awareness of the 6g figure for recommended daily intake from a 3% baseline to over 30%. But she also highlighted that we will only know if the population's salt intake is actually starting to reduce once we have the results later this year of the tests to measure salt levels in the body. Dame Deirdre also commended the work of CASH and other NGOs such as the British Heart Foundation (BHF) for their work that complements the FSA campaign and allows ethnic minority groups particularly susceptible to the effects of too much salt to be reached. Dame Deirdre spoke about one promising avenue to pursue in future: a possible new link with Asian satellite TV networks - to get salt, and other healthy eating advice, into cookery programmes. This work stems from a contact made with TV producers when the FSA went into mosques to talk with the imams about salt and healthy eating as part of the BHF's Ramadan Campaign. Dame Deirdre finished her speech by stating that she was confident that the approach taken by the FSA was the right way to achieve salt reduction. 'I believe that there is a virtuous circle of consumer demand and market response which can achieve results,' she said, 'we want consumers to look for products with reduced salt, and industry will respond. Our role is to push as hard as we can, setting clear goals to industry about what needs to be achieved regarding their salt reduction programmes. We also need to pull as hard as we can, independently and with NGOs including CASH, to increase public awareness about the dangers of eating too much salt. This push-pull approach is the best way forward'. Ms Caroline Flint C:\Users\carrie\Desktop\Example\Salt Awareness Week\Landing Page\2006 Salt and Ethnic Groups\saw_2006_evaluation_clip_image005.jpgMs Flint opened her speech stating that raised blood pressure, to which salt is a contributing factor, causes 70,000 strokes and heart attacks in the UK alone each year, of which 35,000 are fatal, and that reducing salt intake to less than 6g per day will reduce risk of hypertension by 17%, stroke by 15% and heart disease by 6%. Ms Flint went on to highlight that certain ethnic minority groups are particularly at risk of these diseases, with the South Asian population having a 50% greater risk of heart disease than the rest of the population. Thus, Ms Flint emphasised that prevention via improvements in Primary Care is the way forward, something which is highlighted in the recent White paper addressing goals in Primary Care. With respect to salt reduction Ms Flint spoke enthusiastically about the 6g message, which was the main message of the second phase of the FSA's campaign. Ms Flint suggested that it is easy for consumers to visualize 6g of salt as it is one teaspoon, although she acknowledged that for the majority of the population around 80% of salt was from processed foods and not from salt added by the individual. Ms Flint ended her speech by stating the food industry will want to be ready for the increase in consumer demand for lower salt foods, 'Not only is salt reduction the right thing to do, but it also makes good business sense.' **Question and Answer session** Ms Rose Thompson, lead from CancerBACUP requested that the link between salt and stomach cancer be added to the agenda of forthcoming awareness weeks. Professor MacGregor responded by saying there is accumulating evidence to link a high salt diet with the risk of stomach cancer. 'This is likely to be caused through H Pylori infection.  We know that a high salt diet strips or irritates the gastric lining and this makes it more susceptible to H Pylori infection.  H Pylori infection is known to cause stomach cancer and it is possible that this is the underlying mechanism whereby a high salt intake makes stomach cancer more likely ' Ms Thompson made one final comment that it is important to raise this point now in order to help prevent future increases in stomach cancer incidence. Mr Qaim Zaidi from the BHF thanked the FSA for the grant towards the 'Healthy Ramadan Campaign', targeting 1.5 Muslims in the UK . The FSA grant helped the BHF to train 250 Imams in five major UK cites with large Muslim populations. These trained Imams have disseminated the salt message to thousands of Muslims in the UK . The grant also assisted them in launching a nationwide media campaign targeting South Asian Muslims to raise awareness of the dangers of salt consumption. Mr Zaidi also made the point that South Asian television channels are one of the best ways of reaching first and second generation South Asians. He suggested that future communications using this medium might be one of the most effective ways of reaching these population groups.  'If health programmes are presented in an interesting way we will watch them. Remember we have the ability to watch 3 hour long Bollywood films, and most of us believe in what we see on television'. Both Ms Flint and Dame Deirdre agreed that different approaches to reach different communities were essential and that the effectiveness of the salt campaign would be optimised through NGO work reaching these different communities. Mr Malcolm Kane, expert food technologist and CASH member, followed this point up with a warning to not underestimate the systemic weaknesses in actually delivering the salt message to the right audiences. So for example if the plan is to get salt reduction message into ethnic minority groups he said that it is important to find the right route into reaching these communities. Mr Kane suggested that the food industry's track record of reaching the correct audiences was not good, and he illustrated his point by highlighting the approach taken for the recall of products containing Sudan-1. Britain has had the biggest recall in UK history running continually since April 2003 on foods that contain Sudan-1, a carcinogenic contaminant found in many foods that are eaten by ethnic minority groups such as South Asian, African Caribbean and Chinese communities. However, to Mr Kane's knowledge no product recall messages were communicated specifically to these audiences to ensure they were not using foods that contain Sudan-1. Although a different area of health, Mr Kane argued from this example for some considerable Improvement being needed in targeting the correct audiences with regards to education about salt. Dame Deirdre agreed that it is important to find and use the most effective ways of communicating with different groups. Sylvia MacDonald, journalist from British Baker asked a number of questions, the first few being directed to Professor MacGregor about whether there was any link between salt and osteoporosis. Professor MacGregor said that our salt intake is one of the most important controls of calcium balance in the body." A high salt diet increases the excretion of salt in the urine and causes loss of calcium from the body, whereas reducing salt intake does the opposite and retains calcium in the body.  As osteoporosis is largely due to the long term loss of calcium, it is likely that our salt intake plays a very important role in determining the rate of calcium lost from bones as we get older." Ms MacDonald asked what could be done to make food taste less bland (once salt was removed). Prof MacGregor said that food only tastes bland for around a month, after which the taste buds adapt and become more sensitive to the effects of salt. Prof MacGregor went on to explain that reducing salt intake by half would mean that after a month you taste food in the same way as you did before i.e. food tastes just as salty but with only half the previous salt level. He made a final point that the food industry will soon be in danger of having consumers reject their salty foods once they get used to less salt. Ms MacDonald asked Dame Deirdre what the FSA thought about celebrity chefs who use a lot of salt in their recipes. Dame Deirdre agreed that a lot of chefs used salt in their recipes and said that working with these chefs to reduce the amount of salt they use is something the FSA wished to pursue. Ms MacDonald asked the FSA if the clear labelling of salt will become compulsory. Dame Deirdre answered that labelling was voluntary but that they were working with the food industry to adopt a simple signposting scheme (that the FSA plan to roll out soon) consistently and on all products. Ann Bruce, a journalist also from British Baker asked the FSA when the consultation on salt targets will become available. Dame Deirdre said the results will be made public at the end of February/beginning of March 2006. Ms Bruce also asked what the next phase of the FSA campaign will be about. Dame Deirdre responded to this by saying that the results of the second phase will impact on the messages and content of the third phase. However, as the second phase is still being evaluated she had no further details on the third phase. Professor Helen Hilly, the Chair at Race for Health highlighted that her organisation has 4-5 films aimed at health in many languages which she thought would be useful to many NGOs, including CASH and BHF as part of their educational work. Prof Hally also asked the question as to whether there is a place for low-salt substitutes in places such as chip shops and, if so, will there be any support to consumers in order to reduce the cost of these substitutes. Prof MacGregor answered that 80% of salt consumed is from salt already added by the food industry so the actual impact of salt added by individuals is relatively small. However, he made the point that there are some salt alternatives in the form of potassium salts, the most commonly known one being Lo-Salt. He stated that these are better than using salt, but best of all is to add no salt. Mr Malcolm Kane also added that it is most important to get people to prefer the taste of less salty foods rather than going down the route of substituting salt alternatives, which will not do anything to adjust the salt-habituated palate. Ms Ama Amporo, Nutritionist at Free Hospital Enterprise Ltd, suggested that basic food health nutrition standards should be drawn up in the same way that basic food hygiene is a compulsory part of catering. Dame Deirdre agreed with Ms Amporo's point and said that organisations such as Trading Standards were working with both large and small businesses in this way to ensure that the food health nutrition standards, for example reducing salt in catered foods, are being put in place and also followed up to ensure the standards are being upheld. **Stands: House of Commons reception** Five companies had stands: four retailers - Asda, Tesco, M&S, Waitrose - and one food manufacturer, Birds Eye. All of them displayed literature about the work they have been carrying out on salt reduction.   |  |
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