Improving the quality of life of elderly people by co-ordinating research into malnutrition of the elderly

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The focus of the project is on the taste and smell losses that occur with ageing, and how these changes decrease the enjoyment of food, which may subsequently reduce food consumption and the nutritional status of the elderly. Many clinical and laboratory studies have been carried out to examine the cause of these taste and smell dysfunctions, yet the elderly population is largely ignored commercially, as food companies mainly target younger consumers. There are very few products that are designed for the older consumer or care home operators.

The primary aim of the project is to contribute towards the improvement of the quality of life of the elderly. The benefits of the project are most likely to be felt by the frail elderly, but the activities within the project are not confined to this sub-group. It is aimed at improving the understanding of how diet can promote healthy ageing.
**Main goals of the project**

- To co-ordinate European Research activities in this field
- Survey the scientific literature, and to document the current state of the art
- Map national and international research activities on nutrition for the elderly in Europe
- Identify and map centres of excellence
- Identify suitable technologies and policies to improve the diet of the elderly
- Survey National and European legislation
- Improve care providers’ knowledge of healthy food options.
- Develop guidelines and recommendations for best practice
- Dissemination of project’s results

**Expected results**

- Better co-ordinated European research, with improved general level of knowledge of European researchers
- Increased awareness of the problems faced by the frail
- Improved guidelines and recommendations for healthcare professionals and policymakers
- Improved quality of life for the elderly, in particular the frail and vulnerable, through an improvement in the range and quality of food products aimed at this sector of society

**Project work plan**

This work plan is divided into seven different components, called Work Packages (WPs), which represent the main areas of activity within the project. These different WPs are summarised below.

**WP1: Project co-ordination & further development**

This work package is responsible for all other work packages. Work package one includes the resources for all the project meetings, developing the project’s website, informing partners of the project’s progress and also to monitor the progress of the network in completing tasks and achieving the deliverables and milestones.

**WP2: Mapping of current research activities & centres of excellence**

This part of the project will assemble much of the fundamental knowledge that will underpin the project’s other work packages. Through patent and literature searches partners will be able to assess the current state of the art, to identify which technologies are suitable for further exploitation. A mapping of centres of excellence in research into nutrition and care for the elderly will also be produced within work package two; this will be used to identify leading players in the European Research Area.

**WP3: Co-ordination of European research activities**

The project aims to co-ordinate and direct European research activities in the field. Research co-ordination seminars will be held, where members’ other projects are discussed; this will aid with dissemination of research results and help focus European research. Four expert groups will also be formed to attend meetings that will consist of discussions of common themes of interest and lectures from invited guests; these will lead to final publications.

**WP4: Analysis of legislation & recommendations for the future**

This work package will build a complete picture of existing legislation at European, national and local level regarding food provision. Any benefits from legislation will be reported, as will potential drawbacks or areas where improvements could be made. A report will also be produced with recommendations and guidelines for future standards and legislation to promote the use of suitable food products for the frail elderly across Europe.

**WP5: Mapping of product development**

It is a goal of the project to construct a database of interested food producers and manufacturers, research institutions, and non-governmental agencies involved in food nutritional, or gerontological research. The effectiveness of current activities that are aimed at healthier food for the frail elderly will be studied in order to compile a report on how best to promote food designed for long-life and well-being.

**WP6: Implementation strategies**

Through workshops and results from previous work packages, a guidance booklet will be produced advising healthcare professionals, nursing staff etc., of the specific dietary needs of the frail elderly. It will also recommend the best methods for achieving these.

**WP7: Dissemination and Technology Transfer**

This work package aims to publicise the project and to ensure that its findings and outputs are put into effect. Technology transfer workshops will be held to spread best practice and transfer expertise and know-how throughout Europe.