

Headache UK

An alliance working for people with headache



Action Points for political parties

Migraine and headache are the most common neurological conditions in the UK, affecting one in six people. Their impact is significant, in health and economic terms, costing the UK an estimated £7 billion. Headache UK is a coalition of organisations representing the needs of 10 million people living with migraine and headache. It wants more recognition of the public health impact of chronic headache and an improvement in diagnosis and treatment for sufferers.

Increasing public health funding for migraine and headache

Migraine and headache are the least publicly funded of all neurological conditions, particularly relative to their economic impact. There is currently insufficient funding to provide specialist care to sufferers. The conditions are generally treatable so there is potential for very large gains to the economy through relatively small investment.

Headache UK calls for funding levels for migraine and disabling headache to be equal to that of comparable conditions such as asthma. Health and research budgets needs to be redrawn to be more proportionate to the scale and extent of migraine and headache in the UK.

Stopping the Declining Research Base

The level of research into headache disorders is dwindling. The UK is likely to fall further behind the USA and the rest of Europe, which will make it even less attractive for future pharmaceutical interest.

Headache UK calls for a boost in research funding for migraine and headache disorders.

Meeting the Every Child Matters Agenda for Children with Migraine

One in ten children suffers from migraine and loses between 32 days and three months of school on average per year. This problem lacks adequate recognition, adversely affecting two of the Every Child Matters (ECM) outcomes – Achieving and Staying Healthy. In addition, children with migraine are often unable to access their medication whilst at school which results in longer, more painful attacks.

Headache UK calls for the Department for Children, Schools and Families to undertake a review of education provision for migraine sufferers in line with the ECM agenda and Health Schools Programme. It also calls for schools to recognise migraine as equal to other chronic conditions such as asthma or diabetes.

Instate more GPs with Special Interest in Headache and Specialist Headache nurses

The development of GPs with Special Interest in Headache has begun to improve treatment and management of headache and migraine, but there are still very few of them. In the UK there are also only 12 specialist headache nurses and none in Northern Ireland. Both the specialist GPs and nurses can significantly reduce waiting times and cut costs, reducing waiting time for neurologists and speeding up referral time for those who need further investigation.

Headache UK wants a GP with Specialist Interest in Headache and a specialist headache nurse in every Primary Care Trust by 2014.

Training of Health Professionals

Medical students might only receive one hour's training on disabling primary headache whilst nurses may receive none. Provision on GP training courses is variable and often absent. Considering the prevalence of people living with migraine and disabling headache in the community, this situation urgently needs addressing.

Headache UK calls for a minimum training time of three hours for GPs and two hours for nurses. GPs and nurses should also have greater access to Continuing Professional Development courses in migraine and headache.

Medication Overuse Headache

Medication Overuse Headache (MOH) is an often unrecognised condition brought on by overuse of codeine-based products, many of which are available over-the-counter. It is often misdiagnosed or not diagnosed and continues due to easy availability of the products.

Headache UK calls for a review of the use of codeine-based products together with initiatives to raise awareness of MOH to reduce its incidence.

Raising the profile of disabling headaches

Raising the profile of disabling conditions such as cluster headache among health professionals will give a quicker and more accurate diagnosis.

Headache UK recommends an education campaign throughout the NHS to raise awareness of disabling and rare manifestations of headache and migraine.

Saving £2 billion a year

Headache UK believes a shift of focus from funding the effects of headache and migraine and lost productivity (costing the UK £7 billion per year) to better training, diagnosis and research, could make a saving of at least £2 billion per year.

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