

WRITTEN QUESTION E-3090/08
by Dorette Corbey (PSE)
to the Commission

Subject: Korsakov's Syndrome

In the Netherlands, some 10 000 people are currently suffering from Korsakov's Syndrome. It is not known how many people are suffering from it in Europe as a whole. The principal symptom is memory loss caused by a deficiency of Vitamin B1, also known as thiamine. Thiamine deficiency is very damaging to the brain and the nervous system. Korsakov's Syndrome is commonest among men aged between 45 and 65. Women who develop it tend to do so at an earlier age, and it develops twice as fast in women as in men (www.korsakovkenniscentrum.nl, www.korsakovsyndroom.nl, www.alzheimer-nederland.nl).

Excessive consumption of alcohol and poor diet are the principal cause of thiamine deficiency and hence of Korsakov's Syndrome. Although the syndrome is incurable, it is not a progressive disease, and any deterioration can be prevented by means of total abstinence and a healthy diet with extra vitamins. The genesis of the disease can be prevented by timely and adequate administration of Vitamin B1 to alcoholics with inadequate diets.

Korsakov patients find that their functioning is hampered by memory loss and loss of orientation, as well as fear of failure. However, the greatest damage is caused by a lack of mental clear-sightedness and planning, as a result of which sufferers' own behaviour can no longer be organised and controlled. People suffering from Korsakov's Syndrome also have great difficulty in absorbing new information and learning new things (www.alzheimers.org.uk). Living and working independently is difficult, if not impossible, and there is a risk of social derailment and exclusion.

1. Does the Commission have any statistics on the number of patients suffering from Korsakov's Syndrome in the EU?
2. How can and will the Commission devote extra attention to Korsakov's Syndrome within existing programmes (e.g. the Alcohol Platform, Health Programme, Social Exclusion)?
3. How can and will the Commission help to gather together knowledge about Korsakov's Syndrome, the causes and treatment of the syndrome and its impact on patients and their surroundings (employment, informal care, etc.)?
4. Can and will the Commission encourage programmes for the preventive administration of Vitamin B1 to alcoholics?