

THE NEWCASTLE UPON TYNE HOSPITALS NHS FOUNDATION TRUST

COUNCIL OF GOVERNORS

CHILDREN'S MENU REVIEW

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The new Children's Menu has now been available in all children's wards in the Royal Victoria Infirmary since November 2010, and in the two children's wards at the Freeman Hospital since October 2011. Overall, it has been highly successful. The children love it and so too, do their parents. This has had an obvious knock-on effect:

- Clinicians are therefore pleased and health and well being are promoted.
- Ward staff agree that it has had a positive effect on the well-being of the children and their general mood.
- Catering staff are, rightly so, proud of what they are doing.
- Dieticians are delighted that the children now eat much better whilst in hospital.
- Whilst up-take of meals has soared, wastage has plummeted. This has also resulted in much improved use of money spent, and indeed savings too.

Bearing in mind the strong emphasis now placed on the quality of hospital food - and children's food in particular - through various recent television programmes, our dedicated, a la carte children's menu can only have served to further improve the Trust's profile.

That said, there are some issues which must be addressed to maintain these benefits. These are fully explained in the attached report.

The main issues are:

- Menu completion. As scanning can only detect shading, a method of shading, rather than ticking boxes must be found. At present when choices have only been ticked, a member of the catering staff has to input the data by hand.
- Storage space. The extra shelving promised at the start has still not come for various reasons.
- Another trolley is needed. An extra ward was included with the re-organisation during the move into the new Great North Children's Hospital building.

The success of this project is largely due to excellent teamwork across several departments and all those involved deserve high praise.

Sandy Harvey
Public Governor
10th January 2012

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CHILDREN'S MENU REVIEW

1. INTRODUCTION

The Children's Menu Review was conducted by Sandy Harvey, Public Governor with an interest in Children's Services and James Callaghan, Paediatric Dietetic Manager.

The Great North Children's Hospital at the Royal Victoria Infirmary and children's wards at the Freeman Hospital were visited, reviewed and appraised.

The new a la carte menu was designed and introduced to ensure that children treated within the Trust are offered the best possible food, which is both nutritionally appropriate to them, as well being child-friendly.

The menu was developed through consultation with children, parents, ward staff, dietitians and catering staff.

Trials and a pilot test were then carried out and results examined in detail. A full roll-out programme was started at the RVI in July 2010 which introduced the new menu and implementation systems in stages, ward by ward. This was completed at the RVI by November 2010.

Once this implementation process was complete and comfortably embedded in the RVI, work began to extend the benefits of the new menu to all children being treated within the Trust, including the two children's wards based at the Freeman Hospital.

This review was intended to examine two of the departments involved – Catering and Ward side activity, including staff, parents and children. All aspects of the menu were appraised and any areas which may need addressing identified.

The third department involved in the conception and implementation of the new children's menu – Dietetics –ensured that menu development has been ongoing throughout this first year. The Dietetic team regularly update the main product database to ensure that any modifications of products made by suppliers are not only still suitable for children, but are also as the children would want and expect from the menu.

Special dietary needs, including weaning-baby foods and the provision of the children's menu for children being treated on adult wards in the Trust, are also being addressed.

2. ROYAL VICTORIA INFIRMARY

The RVI has now had the new menu for just over a year.

Catering Department.

Work continues to ensure maximum value for money, whilst maintaining all the benefits of the new menu.

Smarter working methods were a crucial part of the initial implementation of the new menu and are still being sought to ensure the highest standards whilst still meeting further Cost Improvement Programme targets. Picking and packing methods have been streamlined and reconfiguration of staffing responsibilities has been carried out, to work more effectively.

The new trolleys work exceptionally well, contributing greatly to the whole improved patient experience. Indeed, one more trolley is required for a further ward which now treats children. The efficacy of the new trolleys is clearly demonstrated in that the quality of the food on this ward has been questioned, whereas there have been no quality issues on the other children's wards which do use the new trolleys. Finance for the additional trolley is in the process of being sought from charitable funds.

A new double-checking system for the children's meals has been devised in the kitchens. This is to ensure that the choices requested and what is actually sent up, are accurate.

The whole system is now effective and successful overall. Two points however, were raised which can cause difficulties.

1. Menu Completion

The scanning system used for the children's menu requires careful completion of the menu cards. If the selection boxes are not properly covered the choice will not register. This causes omissions of some choices and in some cases, no choices at all will register, so a member of the kitchen staff then has to manually reprocess that entire menu card.

2. Storage Space

The introduction of the IWAVE system of meals for some adult wards has resulted in further pressure on storage space within the freezer. There is concern that staff are unable to move safely between the shelving units. It was noted that new shelving agreed at the start of the introduction of the children's menu had never been received.

A risk assessment is being carried out to identify the issues regarding storage within the freezer compartment and any actions found to be necessary can then be taken.

It must also be noted that the Catering staff should be commended for the work they have accomplished and the changes effected, which have been key in ensuring the continued and effective supplying of the new children's meals, to the highest possible standard.

Wards

a. Staff Feedback

Four wards were visited during the review. We spoke to a variety of staff including the staff nurses, Health Care Assistants, play specialist workers and reception staff.

Staff reported that the children's menu provision is going well. The wide range of choice gives children the opportunity to try different foods that they may otherwise not choose.

Considering the point raised in the Catering department regarding menu completion, particularly at weekends, staff will trial a system of putting a note on the off duty sheets to remind weekend staff to complete the menus and endeavour to make it a high priority amongst the staff.

Some wards use a communal table for mealtimes, where there are the facilities for this. One ward also has a separate little room to which the teenagers may go to give them extra autonomy. The children are given the option to sit at the table when it is clinically appropriate.

One ward has unfortunately not yet got one of the new trolleys. This will now be sought as a priority with funding from Charitable sources. The general concern on this ward was regarding the quality of the food:

- The chicken nuggets are acceptable, but soggy.
- The chips are either hard or soggy.
- The food becomes crusted around the edges of the trays.

As it is only this ward that is still using the old trolleytype, it became clear that this was the reason for the food not regenerating to the same high quality.

Some additional, general comments were given at various times on different wards.

- Some staff find it difficult to judge the amounts/portions that should be given.
- More soft options would be beneficial, such as a mixture of mashed carrots and turnip.
- Some children would also like plated salads i.e. lettuce, tomato, cucumber.
- More sponge/cake choices would be great as another pudding option with custard or as a cake snack.

b. Children and Parent Feedback

On all the wards we visited, we spoke to several children, young people and parents, as well as a breast-feeding mother.

Below are some of the comments and quotes we received:

Child 1

The child's mother reported that the food is good and that she appreciated the need to include 'child friendly foods' in conjunction with nutritionally appropriate foods, to ensure that the children do eat. She was happy with the quality of the meals and she enjoyed choosing foods with her daughter.

Breast-feeding Mum

We asked for views regarding the meal provision for her, (in lieu of her child). She reported that the quality of the food is good, although it could run the risk of become boring during a long stay in hospital. She also suggested that it would be good to have a basic tomato sauce as an option, particularly to use on the plain pasta if desired. This is now being looked in to as an additional option.

Child 2 (16 years old)

'The new children's menu is much better than the old menu. I love the dinners, especially the spaghetti bolognese and the curry. I also love the sticky toffee pudding.'

When asked if she thought that she would become tired of the same menu choice over a long inpatient stay, she replied, 'I would not get bored of it'.

Child 3 (approximately 2 years old)

Parents reported 'good to have familiar and snack type foods, plain pasta is a really good idea. I wouldn't suggest anything else to include in the menu, it is what I would generally make at home. Baked potatoes are a good idea as there are a variety of fillings available. It might be an idea to include a wider variety of fruit e.g. pears. Generally good to have the building blocks for making meals'.

Child 4

Didn't like the carrots as they had 'black bits', nor the plain pasta, as it was too dry. However she liked the burgers, beans and jacket potatoes. When asked if there was any food she wished available on the menu, she suggested the option of a chicken burger (as this is what she would choose in McDonald's, together with a strawberry milkshake).

Child 5 (14 years old) – (inpatient for 6 weeks).

Generally sometimes a little fed up with the choices on the menu. Likes macaroni cheese but the current one on the menu is bland. Sometimes when raspberry jelly is requested, lime jelly is sent and this is refused.

Child 6 (inpatient for 4 days).

Parents and child reported 'There is nothing missing from the menu. There is a good variety and the quality is perfect. 'We love the chicken curry'.

Waste

Prior to the new Children's Menu being introduced, there were often wastage levels of up to 80%. Full, unopened trays of perfectly good, prepared food were thrown away simply because it was not what the children wanted. Many parents felt the need to bring in food to feed their children.

During the initial three month trial of the new menu, waste plummeted to an average of around 10%. This has continued to be monitored on a regular basis throughout the year and waste levels have remained at a similar, minimal level.

During this review not one parent had brought in any meals for their child. All children ate their meals from the new menu. This is a clear demonstration of the variety, choice and quality of the food served, with everyone finding sufficient on the new menu to be satisfied.

3. FREEMAN HOSPITAL

The Freeman Hospital has now had the new menu for just over three months.

a. Catering department

Staff Present

2 Chefs

2 office staff.

The menu is very popular and works very well for all the children on both wards in the Freeman Hospital too.

Indeed, requests for the children's menu are being received from adult wards by young adults aged between 18 and 25 years. There is a concern that this could escalate, however reassurance was given that the a la carte menu Children's Menu is intended only for the children in the Trust (up to 18 years of age). Ward 34, which is the young people's cancer unit, is the agreed exception.

There are negligible requests from the adult menu by children although this is still always on offer. Children choose from the Children's a la carte menu, but occasionally something may be chosen from the adult menu by breastfeeding mums. It is agreed that the standard Core Menu will continue to be offered as an alternative should this be wanted.

Two concerns were raised:

1. Some problems arise if menu cards are not completed properly at ward level (boxes are 'ticked' instead of 'shaded'), or are not sent down in time from the wards. This results in problems with scanning the menus and influences numbers of foods requested, as well as timing delays. This is difficult as the catering process with the children's menu can take longer due to individual picking all of the dishes and the wards sometimes then contact the Catering Department to complain that not all the menu choices have been sent.

2. There is currently a problem with freezer space. This should however, be resolved next year (2012) as new freezers are due to be installed.

The most popular choices are the chicken curry, fish fingers, sausages, chicken nuggets and chips.

Overlap between the children's menu and the standard adult menu has now been started with some dishes, when appropriate. For example, if macaroni cheese is being made that day for the adult menu, this is portioned appropriately for the children. It is then also sent to the children's wards if macaroni cheese has been requested from the children's menu. Rice pudding is another such example.

b. Wards.

As in the RVI, no parents had felt the need to bring in any meals for their child, all are catered for from within the Trust.

Ward 11

Staff:

Healthcare Assistants,
Staff Nurses
Ward Sister

Ordering is done in block amounts on this ward, e.g. 3 portions of 3 different main courses etc, as patients are rarely in hospital for more than 1 or 2 days at most. However it was emphasised that a full variety of meals are ordered and the same items are never ordered for lunch and supper.

The standard provision regarding quality of the food is also improved, particularly in the quality of the vegetables. However, the pizza or burgers can sometimes be overcooked, or some items are not received, such as gravy.

One issue that can arise is the fact that on occasions the hot sticky toffee pudding is brought in the cold section of the trolley rather than the hot section. This means they then have to be served cold, rather than a hot pudding as it is intended.

The adult menu is not offered on this ward. Staff agreed that there is more choice and likelihood of uptake with products from the new children's menu.

Three issues on product availability were made:

1. Mayonnaise or salad cream needs to be more readily available than currently.
2. Plain tomato sauce for pasta would be great for teenage patients in particular.
3. It would be good to have more sponge/cake choices, particularly as puddings e.g. chocolate sponge/plain sponge.

Further comments were as follows:

- 'The new a la carte children's menu is much better than what was previously provided. There is a definite improvement.'
- There is not much waste now at the end of meal service.
- The children did like cottage pie from the adult menu but it was then agreed that the putting together the minced beef and mashed potatoes already on the menu could easily create an acceptable substitute.
- Parents don't bring in foods as they used to e.g. McDonald's.
- Bread buns and sandwiches can be somewhat stale on occasions.
- The gravy is better now.
- There is now the opportunity for children and teenagers especially to eat together at mealtimes. The Teenage Corner Room at the end of the ward is available and now also used as a dining room.

Ward 23

Staff feedback:

Nursing Staff

Healthcare Assistants

Staff again reported that the new menu is going well and is successful. Very little food is ordered now from the adult menu and the children think the a la carte children's menu is better. There is now greater flexibility for children to have various combinations at mealtimes.

However, the ward is keen to keep the choice of the adult menu as an option in addition to the children's a la carte. This has been agreed and will continue.

Furthermore, staff noted that parents rarely now bring any food in to the ward for their children as there is provision for all tastes, even the more 'picky eaters'. The ward sister mentioned that parents had said their children were eating better.

Additionally, a member of staff who is frequently the key person dealing with the meals on the ward commented that children are eating better and look forward to meal times now. She makes a point of making the food look attractive on the plate. However, it must be noted too, that this can take up more time than is available so this needs to be monitored carefully.

The possibility of a different lunch and tea menu was raised. As the a la carte menu is so very comprehensive, with fifty different food options always available, there was discussion regarding offering half the number at each of the two meals, or alternating the main courses at lunch and tea. However, for various reasons, the conclusion was reached that it is better to maintain the full availability at each, as it stands currently.

This ward too, would like a basic tomato pasta sauce to be put on the menu. This would be thought to be very useful and could be added to a number of different foods.

Parents and children:

Parents are saying that the food is better when compared to other children's hospitals that they have visited.

The ward School Teacher also approached us to specifically comment on how well the children now eat and included mentioning the attractive plating up of the food by some staff.

Child who had been an inpatient for 2½ weeks with her parents:

"The Children's menu is great. The food here is like the Hilton compared to the other hospitals we have been in."

"The previous children's hospital that our child visited had a total of only 5 choices on the menu and the chicken nuggets and fish fingers were soggy. In fact everything was soggy."

"We are amazed at the choice available here. Our child has never complained about becoming tired of the choice available and she definitely prefers the options from the children's menu to the adult menu, especially because she likes plainer foods."

4. CONCLUSION

The introduction of the new child-friendly menu has been highly successful on all counts. When questioned about how satisfied parents are with nutritional provision for their child, all reported that they were happy. No mean feat considering how fussy some children can be!

Although no direct comparison has, or can be made regarding the length of stay in hospital or recovery rates, it is well accepted that a happy child is likely to recover back their strength more quickly. Food and nutrition play such an integral part of how we feel both physically and emotionally, this can only be positive in the overall care and treatment given.

Sandy Harvey
Public Governor
10th January 2012