



UNIQUENESS OF HOSPITAL FOOD SERVICE

***Ramesh, S. and Manimegalai, B.**

Department of Dietetics, Christian Medical College, Vellore, India

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ABSTRACT

Hospital food service has an indispensable influence in the treatment process of in-patients by giving nutritious food. Hospital food service is a service based industry. Hospital food service is unique just because it serves food to the patients group. Patients get hospitalized to get treatment for their ailments and nutrition plays an extremely critical role in many disease conditions. The types of diets that are available in the hospital will not be available anywhere except in the hospital food service. Apart from the types of diets there are many other things that are very unique in its own way like the role played by a clinical dietitian, guest relation executives, food service stewards etc. Hospital food service is just not only a food service; it is a part of the patient's treatment. Hospital food service doesn't work independently; it is a collaborative team effort of several disciplines to provide the ultimate patient experience.

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INTRODUCTION

The mission of hospital dietetics is to encourage and maintain health through adequate and appropriate nutrition intake of individuals and groups. Hospital food service plays an essential part in the treatment process of the patient during the course of hospitalization by providing nutritious food. Hospital food service is a specialty and merits special consideration. It is unique and complex requiring trained personnel. The demands on a hospital kitchen or dietetics department are complex because of the type of clientele, the treatment regimens, medication, infection and type of service required. The 'MENU' is the blueprint of operation in any catering establishment. The nutritional value of the food and its suitability for the resident client group is determined by the menu. The main elements to be considered in good menu planning are the clients and the situation. The menu must be reviewed regularly by the nutritional experts appointed by the hospitals. Hospital food services are meant to provide hygienic, safe and balanced nutritious food to the patients that will enable patients for a very quick recovery.

Uniqueness of Hospital Food Service: The service of food is an art and represents the manner as well as the atmosphere in which food is presented to the customer. The uniqueness of hospital food service is the types and varieties of diets

prepared in the hospital kitchen. Hospital food might not get the best reputation when compared with the Restaurant / Hotel Foods just because of the level of expectations of the taste. Hospital food service pays complete attention taking into consideration the health conditions of the patients. Hospital foods have the right amount and right quality of ingredients with the right amount of salt without any taste enhancers, artificial colors and preservatives. Hospital food service sets high quality standards when it comes to good nutritional offerings. Dietitians in the hospital are the nutritional experts who outline a customized diet plan for each patient based on the medical condition and the diet prescription recommended by the treating doctor. In many hospitals, patients are discouraged taking outside foods during their course of hospitalization. The objective of such restrictions is to ensure that patient eats a healthy and balanced diet according to his / her health condition ensuring patients' condition doesn't deteriorate with outside food; empowering a quick recuperation. A patient on hospital diet does not usually have the alternative of purchasing meals elsewhere. Since the patient does not have any other option, it is the obligation of the hospital food service to provide patient acceptable nutritious diet throughout their course of treatment in the hospital.

Diet Therapy: Eating food and drink as part of treatment is alluded to as Diet therapy to improve and wellbeing support. It is concerned with the use of food as an agent in effecting

recovery from illness. Hospital food service predominant role is to support the patients in the recovery process; hence it is called as Diet Therapy. Since it is a diet therapy there are a lot of restrictions during preparation and obviously the taste and presentation of the diet varies. Many illnesses are successfully managed effectively by providing appropriate disease specific diets such as diets for Diabetes Mellitus, Kidney Disease, Liver Disease, etc.

Meal planning: The prime objective of meal planning is to achieve nutritional adequacy. The diets are planned in such a way it meets the nutritional needs of the individuals getting hospitalized. Since no single food can meet all the nutritional requirements and hence it becomes extremely important to achieve a balance of nutrients through a combination of different foods included in the hospital diet. The diets in the hospitals are usually planned by including foods from the five food groups.

Ultimately, the meal should contain the following major food groups which makes the diet balanced

1. Cereals, millets
2. Pulses
3. Vegetables and fruits
4. Milk and meat products
5. Fat, sugar, nuts and oil seeds.

Acceptability of meals: The usual likes and dislikes of the patients are kept in mind. Due consideration is given to color, texture, taste and flavor for better acceptability of the food. Variety is achieved through the following strategies adopted by the Hospital food service.

Principles of therapeutic Diet: Nutritional status is achieved through a well-planned diet which provides all the nutrients that the body requires. During sickness, the body tissues require proper nutrients in good amounts to facilitate speedy and quick recovery of patients. Modifying a normal diet to a therapeutic to meet the nutritional requirements of sick patient is an art.

The general objectives of diet therapy are

- To maintain good nutritional status.
- To correct nutrient deficiencies which may have occurred due to the disease
- To afford rest to the whole body or to the specific organ affected by the disease.
- To adjust the food intake to the body's ability to metabolize the nutrients during the disease.
- To bring about changes in body weight whenever necessary.
- To reduce the complication and severity of the disease.

Factors considered while planning therapeutic diets]

- Anthropometric measurements of the patient
- Disease condition of the patient and the duration of disease
- Nutrients that needs to be altered in the diet to overcome disease
- Patients diet tolerance

Types of diets available in hospitals: Hospital food service provides various types of diets which is shown in Table 1

Table 1.

Types of Diets	Patient Categories
Normal Diet	All patients who do not have any dietary restrictions
Salt Free Diet	Patients with Chronic Liver Disease (CLD), Hypertension (HT) and Chronic Kidney Disease (CKD) etc
Bland Diet	Patients who do not tolerate spices, geriatric patients and the children.
Soft Solid Diet	Patients with swallowing difficulty, geriatric patients, and patients in intensive care units (ICU)
Liquid Diet	Patients with swallowing difficulty, cancer on chemotherapy / radiation therapy, and patients who have undergone surgery will be started on liquid diets
Clear Fluid	For patients who have undergone surgery, swallowing difficulty, for procedures like colonoscopy etc
Enteral / Formula Feeds	Patients who cannot take diet orally and on tube feeds support
Disease Specific	Patients with Diabetes, Renal Disease, Liver Disease, Pulmonary Disease, Cardiac disease, GI disorders, malabsorption, mal digestion etc
Nutrient Specific	High and Low Carbohydrate, High and Low Protein, High and Low Fat, High and Low Fibre, Medium Chain Triglyceride (MCT) based diet, high and low potassium, high and low sodium, high and low calcium, low phosphorous, fluid restricted diets etc.

- Selecting foods from each food group
- Including a variety of vegetables and fruits to add color
- Using different methods of cooking such as baking, boiling, and steaming to bring variety in texture.
- Using alternative garnishes and accompaniments

Portion sizes

Quantity plays a vital role when it comes to meal planning. Due consideration is given while planning and preparation whether the portion size recommended be easily consumed by the patient. The consumption of food differs based on the age, gender and the activity performed. Whatever quantity that has been planned for every patient should meet their nutritional needs. This is very tricky and tedious, however the nutritional experts easily manages it.

Cyclic Menu: To set a very good menu option, cyclic menu is the best way to prevent dissatisfaction resulting from monotony. The 'MENU' is the blueprint of operation in any catering establishment. A hospital food service usually has a minimum of 2-5 weeks cyclic menu. Hospital food menu is planned taking into consideration the basic food habits of the patients of the particular region. Consumption of food depends on its acceptability. Nutritional concerns with respect to sugar, salt and complex carbohydrate content of the diet is addressed in the menu planning by the nutritional experts making it as a pleasant dining experience to the patients without compromising on the nutritional quotient.

Exclusive Patient Nutrition Care: Patients are closely monitored by the Dietitians throughout their course of hospitalization ensuring adequate nutritional support. Patients

are also provided Nutritional education and counseling on the diet pattern to be followed after discharge from the hospital.

Food Safety and Hygiene: In hospital set up, sick people get admitted to restore their good health. It becomes extremely important to provide safe and hygienic food when they are in the hospital. Hospital food service should be very vigilant enough to see that there is no room for error when it comes to providing patient food service. Hospital food service adheres to the safety and hygiene guidelines laid down.

Food Sampling: Items that are served to patients are kept as food samples. Food sampling is done to ensure that the food served to the patients does not contain harmful contaminants.

Food Service: The service of food is an art and represents the manner as well as the atmosphere in which food is presented to the customer. Good service represents clean serving, properly selected serving equipment, and well-behaved, neatly dressed and pleasant food service stewards. Food service stewards are the group of people who are responsible for supplies of food to the patients. Delivering right diet to the right patient every time is a carefully orchestrated team effort when it comes to patient food service. Hospital catering has its own problems which often make it very difficult to provide correctly served meals. Wards are sometimes spread over a wide area, food may have to travel over long distances and meals are strictly timed. Also patients must have a choice of food and that choice should be exercised as close to the time of service as possible. Food must be distributed as quickly as possible. Hot holding of food has disastrous consequences for its nutritional values, its appearance, and its taste, and must be kept to a minimum. The timing and logistics of distribution must be carefully planned and monitored. From the moment a patient arrives in the facility and until the patient leaves, medical, nursing and dietetics team coordinate efforts for patients to meet their dietary needs. Food service workers play an important role in timely delivery of food to patients. The process is complete only when the diet is served to the patient on time, every time, to the right patient.

Guest Relation Executives (GRE): Though dietitians are there to take care of the nutritional needs of the patients, Guest relation executives have a major role to play in identifying and understanding the patient's requirements and help the patients along with the dietitians. Guest relation executives are not dietitians. Guest relations executives are the patient satisfaction influencers / enhancers. GRE's closely assess on the patient satisfaction aspect on the food the patients receive. If the patient is not comfortable, then GRE's are the first person to take note of the requirement and communicate to the dietitian to adjust diets according to the requirements of the patient.

Plate Waste Assessment: Plate waste is a method to find out the amount of food that has not been eaten by the patient. Wasted food is not just a food that merely goes as a waste into the environment, it invariably affects the nutritional goals and targets set by the dietitians to be achieved on patients. High levels of plate waste leads to malnutrition related complications. No matters how well a diet has been planned, it matters the most only when the patient consumes the food completely. Plate waste assessment is one of the effective determinants of the level of acceptance of food by the patients. The reasons for the plate wastes in hospitals are portion size,

appetite, food not up to their expected taste etc. By performing regular monitoring and audits, plate waste assessments provides inklings on the strengths and the weaknesses of the menu options available to the patients. The advantage of performing plate waste audit also allows identifying patients who have not eaten the food properly. Alternative options can be provided if the patients have eating / swallowing difficulties such as providing texture modified diet or making changes in their menu without compromising on the nutrition quotient immediately. Plate waste assessments eventually ensures adequacy of nutrition support received by patients during their course of hospitalization.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Hospital food service is a department in the hospital which takes care of the nutritional needs of the patients. Provision of food in hospital is a complex and tough process. Hospital food service is completely different from the regular food services such as hotels, restaurants, industrial catering or any other of its kind. Hospital food services prepares and services to the patient group who have been hospitalized to get treatment for their ailments and nutrition plays an extremely critical role in many disease conditions. Superficially it may appear it is just like another food service operations, however the nitty-gritties is a long way from obscure. Hospital food service doesn't work independently; it is an orchestrated cumulative team effort of several disciplines to provide the ultimate patient experience. The challenges faced by hospital food service are also innumerable which has not been discussed. Challenges are prevalent in every profession and hospital food service is not an exception. Since the hospital food service always takes pride and enjoy the work they do for patients, the challenges encountered in the process is ignored grossly.

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