

PATIENT CATERING OVERHAUL IN WEST SUSSEX

In February, a brand new £3m patient catering facility opened at St Richard's hospital in West Sussex to produce patient meals for the three hospitals at the Western Sussex Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust. The highly successful launch, attended by Prue Leith and Matt Hancock, was the fruition of a project which began back in 2017 working with consultant, Neller Davies, as Hospital F+ S finds out.

“The truth is, this is the best institutional food I have ever eaten! And I’ve eaten in schools, hospitals, prisons and all over the place. I think it is amazing. I walked round and I couldn’t think of a single thing to complain about - which is not like me.” Those are the words of Celebrity Chef, Prue Leith, speaking at the opening of this facility.

But it hadn't always been that way.

In 2017, the Trust identified that catering needing improvement following an audit which found a 41% wastage rate of patient food - with common complaints centring around quality and temperature.

Like many modern NHS organisations, Western Sussex was formed through the merger of two previously separate Trusts - the Royal West Sussex and Worthing and Southlands Hospitals. As a result, it had two discrete and disparate catering operations - working from an old kitchen at Worthing hospital with equipment that was no longer fit for purpose and a CPU at St Richard's in Chichester that was solely focused on food production for the one site.

The Trust's Director of Estates at the beginning of this project recognised that something needed to be done about the food service and food waste and ordered a complete review, with the primary objective being to invest in patient catering.

Facilities management consultancy, Neller Davies, was appointed to undertake a review of the patient catering operation, and to research and develop a strategic plan. Apart from the age and condition of

some of the equipment, the review identified some simple issues with kitchen practice, for example, recipes not being followed completely, leading to inconsistencies in the meals served. In addition, there was no cohesion to the food service - the moment the food left the kitchen the caterers were no longer involved - the Last 9 Yards was out of their hands. Ward staff, however, needed better training in food safety or customer service, which had an impact on the delivery of food to the patient with less engagement in the process.

Following this research, Neller Davies presented three models to the Trust, with associated costs: remediating and remodelling the existing operation into a modern, fit-for-purpose service; moving to a different style of service, such as bought-in; or doing nothing. The Trust Board endorsed the first option and retained Neller Davies to work with its different teams, including estates and facilities, dietetic and clinical to deliver the project. This collaborative approach was very important to make sure the right decisions were made and processes put in place from the very beginning.

APPROACH AND RESULTS

Three work streams were established, each led by a professional from the Trust, to methodically break down and focus on aspects of the project including the development of menus, staff engagement across the Trust and design of the service and necessary facilities. Although the work streams each had their own remit,



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they also had to keep an eye on the wider brief and objectives of the project.

The food work stream had to focus on menus, but realising that food should not be a blanket service, needed to consider the varying needs and special requirements of different patient groups. The approach developed means that wards receive a differentiated service depending on those requirements.

The majority of specialist menus have been developed with the dietitians. These vary and range from clinical, cultural and therapeutic meal options. Some special diet meals are brought in externally to meet IDDSI guidelines currently but this is being reviewed.

The new menu was designed jointly by the Trust catering team, dietitians and nursing colleagues (commonly known as the ‘Power of Three’) and facilitated and tested by Neller Davies’ culinary team. It includes up to 50 main meal combinations available every day, vegetarian, vegan and specialist options, finger foods and grazing menus which are popular with older patients and those with specialist requirements.

In addition, external chefs were invited to a cook-off where they were given a bag of ingredients and

challenged to make a dish they thought patients would want to eat. Among the chefs taking part in this initiative was Mark McCann, a former Gold Medallist at the Culinary Olympics, with a long career in contract catering including healthcare experience. Some of the dishes that resulted from this process were ultimately incorporated into the new menu.

To ensure patients receive the best nutrition possible, a new protected mealtimes policy, Meal time Matters, was also launched at the same time as the new menu. The policy means that, during meal-times, all non-essential activities and distractions on the wards stop.

The engagement work stream ensured that patient food was not just the responsibility of a small group of staff in the kitchen. It made food the concern of all and involved HR and nursing teams working to re-train, mentor and guide staff around issues including food safety and customer service. More than 200 people were re-purposed as part of the patient catering team, but there were no redundancies or external recruitment. All of these staff are now integral to all parts of the catering and food service process.

The design team examined different models of food production and service and concluded that re-developing the CPU at St Richard’s to serve all three hospitals at the Trust, with the Worthing kitchen becoming a receipt and distribution unit for the site, was the best solution. Provision was made for the hospitals to safely store and freeze food, leading to less wastage and more availability. At any one time, the

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hospitals can store up to 16,000 meals.

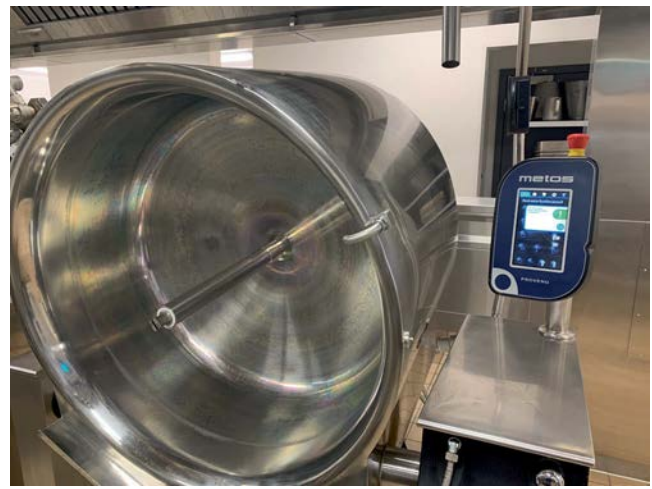
All patient food at the CPU is cooked fresh and portioned into containers which are finished on the wards using a bulk food service system. Patients order from an ‘a la carte’ menu with catering staff taking orders two hours before service using iPads linked to a Datasym system.

The cook-freeze process offers far greater choice for patients which leads to better nutrition (patients are more likely to eat their chosen food), does not need any artificial modification to recipe ingredients and enables food to be served at the correct temperature, as it is slowly heated for 90 minutes on the ward. Food waste was reduced by half in the early days of the CPU going live and continued to fall as the system bedded in.

A significant investment of £1m was made into new state-of-the-art equipment which allows for the implementation of lean processes and a ‘single flow’ design. This means the kitchen is segregated into distinct zones to ensure that there is no cross-contamination and that it complies fully with Food Safety legislation requirements. The Trust rejected the option to refurbish equipment where possible and only buy new where necessary. No equipment is now under condition B status, which is seen as a more sustainable investment. The latest specification industrial-grade equipment has been specified to ensure in-house and external capacity would be met; it was designed for 6,000 meals per day. Trolleys with HACCP controls were also included in the spec to monitor temperature and other elements.

David McLaughlin, Director of Estates and Facilities, Western Sussex Hospitals NHS Trust, says: “We are really pleased with the outcome. For us, we want to continue to evolve the system, and use our offer here as an opportunity to share best practice with others. It’s really important that we all continue to work with each other to help improve patient catering services.”

Julian Fris is an advocate of the Vested, outcome-based model of FM, which is based on a shared vision. Some elements of Vested came into play during this project, particularly the collaboration of different disciplines and the way the Trust worked with suppliers. “The Trust and its staff have delivered this project. Neller Davies gave them the motivation and the tools to do it, but they were the agents of change,” concludes Julian. 



Some of the most popular dishes

- Cottage Pie
- Fish & Chips
- Pork Stroganoff
- Lasagne
- Dhal