

# HOSPITAL FOOD + SERVICE

THE PATIENT / THE WORKFORCE / THE VISITOR

SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2024

## ALLERGIES & INTOLERANCES

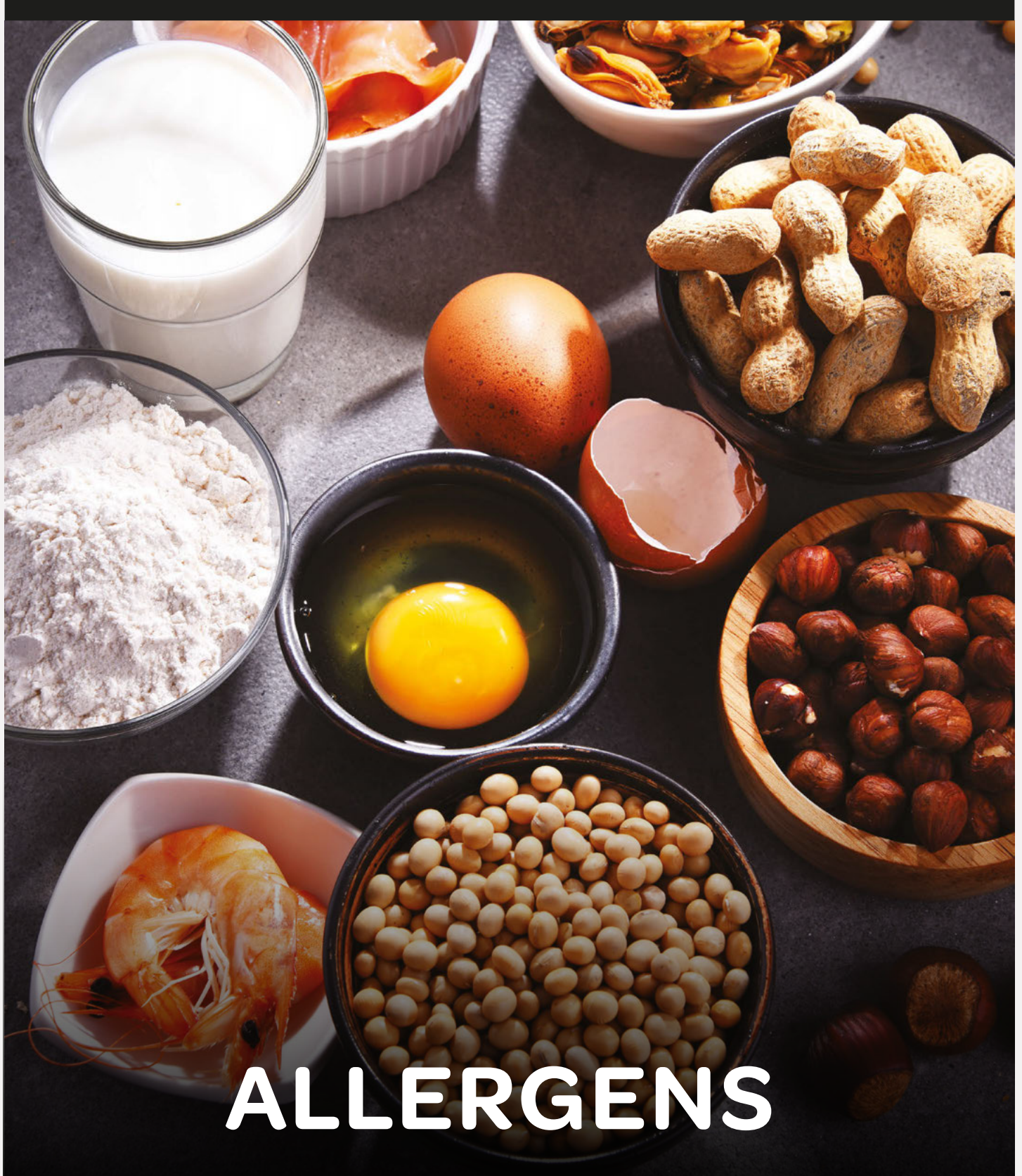
Putting safety first as the number of people suffering with allergies continues to grow

## DISCOVERY DEN

The role of E&F Matrons in raising the catering voice and the importance of challenge

## ON SITE

New Central Production Kitchen transforms services at Royal Bournemouth Hospital



# ALLERGENS





## ***IT'S TIME TO BOOK YOUR PLACE***

**EARLY  
BIRD  
BOOKING  
NOW  
OPEN**

Estates and Facilities Management, in common with the rest of the NHS, remains in a state of flux. The political landscape has changed, and HEFMA's 2025 Forum aims to identify what that means for EFM.

The programme will help to guide E&F service delivery to become an inspirational part of directing how that change affects the patient journey, through our estate and the built environment, to demonstrate how a Return on Investment translates into improved patient care.

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# WELCOME

# BEYOND LIP SERVICE PLEASE

IT'S TIME TO MOVE ON FROM TALKING ABOUT WHAT NEEDS TO HAPPEN TO TAKING ACTION.



We're now a couple of months on from the general election and our new Government is making its voice heard and being referred to as a "mission-led" government. Lord Darzi's rapid review of the state of the NHS was published in September, and highlighted problems that will come as little surprise to most working within the health service. In the report, Lord Darzi also said he had been "shocked", not only by the extent of the problems he uncovered in the NHS, but also by the state of the nation's health.

Getting people back to health and work is being seen as an economic priority. One of the "three big shifts" subsequently outlined by the Prime Minister is to be much bolder in moving

from sickness to prevention. A better diet has a vital role to play in both of these objectives.

This must go hand-in-hand with other reforms, recognising that across the UK we need to improve environmental management – from investing in agriculture to enable farmers to move away from intensive production towards methods that put more back into nature than they take out, to restoring our biodiversity, and please, please to cleaning up rivers and waterways.

As this issue went to press, the Environment Agency published a report on the rapid decline in the salmon numbers in rivers in England and Wales. The report says that between 1997 – when records were first produced – and 2017, at least 20,000 fish were recorded every year. By 2022 this had dwindled to 6,952 and the estimate for 2023 was reported as 5,399. Salmon is sensitive to pollution, so what does this dramatic decline say about the state of our rivers? When we hear so much from experts about what needs to happen if we are to stop destroying the world in which we live, I find it very frustrating that this agenda is not given top priority.

We have a number of features in this issue that reflect these issues. Our food sustainability feature (p22) examines how hospital caterers can engage with British producers and suppliers and start to drive change. Water waste is another issue of growing importance. In A Sustainable Service (p28) we delve into why – and how – caterers should look at their water usage and where they can reduce it. On diet, we not only have our allergies and intolerances feature (p12), but turn to the Hospital Caterer to find a report on the gut microbiome (p12) and how important a healthy gut is for overall physical and mental health. Also in this issue our On Site feature (p8) tours the new Central Production Kitchen at Royal Bournemouth Hospital, and Discovery Den (p34) explores the role of the E&F Matron and what it means for hospital catering services.

I hope you enjoy this issue, and as always, if you have any interesting or successful initiatives that you would like to share with our readership, please get in touch.

Amanda Roberts

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# GOOD FOOD IS GREAT MEDICINE

HOSPITAL CATERERS, CHEFS AND DIETITIANS GATHERED IN SEPTEMBER FOR AN INSPIRING AND INTERACTIVE DAY AT A NEW EVENT, HEALTHCARE CATERING LIVE. IN THE PROGRAMME FOR THE EVENT, PHIL SHELLEY, SENIOR OPERATIONAL MANAGER AND NATIONAL LEAD FOR NET ZERO FOOD AT NHS ENGLAND SAID: “WE’RE DELIGHTED TO HAVE YOU WITH US AS WE EMBARK ON THIS EXCITING JOURNEY TO REVOLUTIONISE HEALTHCARE CATERING TOGETHER.”

The day reinforced the key messages that NHS England has been communicating since the Independent Review of NHS Hospital Food was published in October 2020, and featured a varied speaker programme along with cookery and practical demonstrations, supported by a small exhibition.

Delegates heard from Katherine Crossfield, Senior Specialist Catering Dietitian at Leeds Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust, who reiterated the importance of caterers and dietitians working together to treat patients as individuals and understand their needs.

Niamh Condon (pictured), a dysphagia specialist and owner of Dining with Dignity, gave a practical demonstration of the IDDSI descriptors for texture-modified food, accompanied by expert advice about flavour and consistency of these meals.

Lee Clark, Key Account Manager at ISS Facility Services UK focused on what needs to change, with a sobering reminder of how little some things have changed in 30 years, such as the focus on cost and the risk of malnutrition. He issued a call to action for all – to transform patient care through nutritional meals and revolutionise patient recovery whilst enhancing the patient experience. “Let’s make that difference together,” he urged.

Nick Vadis, Culinary Director – Foodbuy Culinary Solutions and Chef Ambassador at NHS Supply Chain, and Michael Sharp, Culinary Specialist at NHS Supply Chain, turned the attention to elevating



children’s meals in healthcare with a cooking demonstration and commentary around hidden vegetables in the tomato sauce (an idea many parents will be familiar with) and reducing food waste by using up over-ripe bananas in flapjacks that can be taken to the wards as a tasty and nutritious snack.

Idrees Anwar, Lead Dietitian at NHS Supply Chain talked about empowering individuals across the hospital to want to make change, through a culture of understanding.

A most enlightening session from Alana Macfarlane, founder and CEO of The Gut Stuff, and Dr Emily Prpa, Science Manager at Yakult, explained the gut microbiome and its vital role in human health, contributing to the body’s immune system, and influencing everything from skin health to digestion. [For more on the gut microbiome, flip this issue and turn to p12 of the Hospital Caterer].

One final practical demonstration of the day featured Chef Josh Banner and Head Chef Les Beare, both with Sodexo at Wye Valley NHS Trust, who showed delegates how to use an entire cauliflower, including the core and the leaves, in seven different ways.

## PRIORITISING DIETARY SHIFTS

The Food Foundation has reiterated the importance of diet in the nation’s health in a new report that urges the Government to recognise the importance of the food system in fuelling disease. Failure to act in a “decisive way” on food and health during this parliament will, it says, risk worsening outcomes, a stagnated economy and further pressure on the NHS.

‘Eating away at Productivity’ outlines how better diet has “unlocked power” to improve the health of the population. It uses the 2021 Global Burden of Disease data to show that implementing four dietary shifts recommended as part of Henry Dimbleby’s National Food Strategy could save approximately 6,000 lives every year and reduce the total years living with disability (YLD) by 28,857.

The four dietary shifts it outlined were:

- 30% increase in fruit and vegetables
- 50% increase in fibre
- 25% reduction in foods that are high in fat, sugar and/or salt
- 30% reduction in meat.

The Food Foundation points out that these shifts, in volume terms, equate to eating one apple a day and half a can of kidney beans, and cutting out a third of a can of Pringles and less than a single rasher of bacon.







## IS YOUR CONNECTED CATERING EQUIPMENT A CYBER RISK?

The Foodservice Equipment Association (FEA) is urging companies to be vigilant and take actions to reduce the increased threat to cybersecurity caused by Artificial Intelligence (AI).

Kitchen connectivity can bring enormous benefits in terms of improved performance and reliability of equipment. However, cyberattacks have increased dramatically over recent years, and there are indications that AI tools are being used by criminals to hack networks and systems.

The main vector for gaining access to secure networks is still down to users interacting with phishing emails and text messages, or malicious links in websites. Regular staff training and frequent reminders about best practice should form a key part of cybersecurity policy alongside ensuring adequate security systems are in place.

## NATIONAL ALTERNATIVE PROTEIN INNOVATION CENTRE LAUNCHES

Cultured meat, insect-based proteins and proteins made by fermentation could soon be a sustainable and nutritious part of everyday diets, thanks to new UKRI funding.

The UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council (BBSRC) and Innovate UK have invested £15 million in the new National Alternative Protein Innovation Centre (NAPIC).

The centre will drive research and innovation, bolstering the alternative proteins sector in the UK. It will turn ideas into reality and strengthen the UK's position as a leader in this rapidly expanding global market.

The NAPIC ambition is far-reaching. Spanning the entire alternative protein supply chain, the centre will foster innovation across a variety of protein sources, from plant-based and lab-grown meats to protein-rich algae.

Funding for the centre commenced in August 2024 and will continue for five years.

## SINGLE-USE PLASTICS UNDER REVIEW

The Scottish Government has announced a public consultation on the proposed implementation of charging for single-use disposable beverage cups. The Government wants to build on the success of the single-use carrier bag charge introduced in 2014, which demonstrated that a charge can raise awareness, change behaviour and promote responsible consumption. A charge for single-use disposable beverage cups will therefore be modelled on this approach, where appropriate.

The UK Government has also carried out a review of the approaches used to reduce single-use plastics through an online survey.

The Office for the Internal Market (OIM), which is part of the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA), will consider the economic impacts of measures to reduce single-use plastics across the nations. Currently, there is no UK-wide approach to this issue, and foodservice and hospitality businesses have reported issues with the devolved nations moving at varying speeds on packaging regulations.

## STUDY CONFIRMS GLUTEN RISK FROM BIODEGRADABLE FOOD CONTACT MATERIALS

New research from the Technical University of Munich confirms that gluten can migrate from certain biodegradable food contact materials into gluten-free foods, posing a significant risk for individuals with coeliac disease. The study measured gluten levels as high as 203 mg/L in previously gluten-free liquids when exposed to bran-based plates – far exceeding the recommended safe limit of 20 ppm for coeliacs.

Other materials, such as straws made from durum wheat semolina and plates made from wheat bran, were also shown to release significant amounts of gluten, posing risks to those with coeliac disease or wheat allergies. In contrast, cutlery composed of 90% polylactic acid and wheat bran, as well as straws made from rye stalks, demonstrated negligible or no detectable gluten migration.

The study's authors are calling for clear allergen labelling on these materials and further research to clarify exactly which materials pose a risk. In the meantime, coeliac patients are advised to avoid cereal-based food contact materials.



## UP AND RUNNING

The HCA is about to start working on a new website and centralised membership administration programme following a tender process to appoint a supplier. Working Groups as part of its recently launched strategy are also up and running, with progress to report from the Membership and Webinar groups.

Flip this issue and turn to p3 of the Hospital Caterer to read the full welcome message from National Chair, Iain Robertson.



## NEWS



### ALARM BELLS RING OVER CONSUMPTION OF ULTRA-PROCESSED FOODS

New research from the Universities of Cambridge and Bristol has found that adolescents consume around two-thirds of their daily calories from ultra-processed foods (UPFs).

Whilst there is significant variation in UPFs, they tend to indicate poor dietary quality, with higher levels of added sugars, saturated fat and sodium, as well as decreased fibre, protein and micronutrient content. They have been suggested as one of the key drivers of the global rise in diseases such as obesity, type 2 diabetes and cancer.

To look at trends within the UK, researchers from Cambridge and Bristol analysed data from four-day food diaries of almost 3,000 adolescents in the UK National Diet and Nutrition Survey between 2008/09 and 2018/19.

Dr Yanaina Chavez-Ugalde from the Medical Research Council (MRC) Epidemiology Unit at the University of Cambridge, the study's first author, says: "It's clear from our findings that ultra-processed foods make up the majority of adolescents' diets, and their consumption is at a much higher level than is ideal, given their potential negative health impacts."

### GOVERNMENT URGED TO BACK UK GROWERS AND DOUBLE BRITISH FRUIT AND VEG PRODUCTION

The UK must stop relying on imports, and fix diets by doubling the land used to grow fruit and vegetables and backing British, nature-friendly farming, according to environment and farming groups.

In an open letter, co-ordinated by the Soil Association, TV presenters and influencers have joined voices from across the farming, food and environmental sectors to call on Sir Keir Starmer to back and scale up the UK horticulture sector.

Campaigners have highlighted the "vulnerability" of UK horticulture, warning that public health will be further at risk if current trends persist and production continues to decline.

They are raising the alarm over the fact that imports account for most of the fruit and nearly half of the veg consumed in the UK, while less than a third of people eat their five a day.

They call for Government intervention to back sustainable British farmers and growers, and for land used for horticulture in England to double. This would only be a small change to take horticulture from around 2% to 4% of farmland.

## SUPPLIER NEWS

### IAN STONE TO TAKE TOP JOB AT APETITO UK

Ian Stone has been appointed to the role of Chief Executive Designate of healthcare meals producer, apetito UK. He will replace Paul Freeston, who steps down at the end of 2024.

Since joining apetito in 2003, Ian has undertaken a wide range of roles, culminating in his appointment as UK Chief Commercial Officer where he has been responsible for the development of apetito's business-to-business divisions as well as Wiltshire Farm Foods.



### DRIVING SOCIAL VALUE THROUGH SPECIALIST NEW TEAM

Compass One, which brings together the specialist expertise of Compass Group UK & Ireland's ESS, Healthcare and One Retail sectors, has continued to increase its investment in social value and has put in place a dedicated social value team.



The team is made up of specialists in social value, HR, sustainability, nutrition and campaigning, tasked with focusing on this agenda and delivering greater social impact for its clients and local communities, as well as its own colleagues. They will support the ambitions of Compass Group UK & Ireland's Climate Promise, Social Promise and Wellbeing Promise.

### MEDIREST FOCUSES ON WELLBEING AT PETERBOROUGH CITY HOSPITAL

Marking its 17th year of the long-standing partnership with Progress Health and Peterborough City Hospital (PCH), Medirest has opened 'The Wellspring Restaurant'. Following a significant refurbishment of the original restaurant, the new design aims to enhance the dining experience for staff, patients and visitors, providing a welcoming and wellbeing-focused environment.



The official opening was marked by a ribbon cutting ceremony, with Hannah Coffey, Chief Executive, Peterborough City Hospital.

### BIDFOOD WALES SUPPORTS LOCAL

During British Food Fortnight, Bidfood Wales announced the addition of 150 new products dedicated to Welsh provenance to its range.

Bidfood Wales' new range will boast the best in local dairy, meat and poultry, store cupboard essentials and drinks, all of which have been produced or grown by SMEs across Wales.







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ON  
SITE

# DRIVING KITCHEN EFFICIENCIES

HOSPITAL FOOD + SERVICE FINDS OUT ABOUT A NEW CENTRAL PRODUCTION KITCHEN (CPK) THAT HAS TRANSFORMED CATERING OPERATIONS ACROSS UNIVERSITY HOSPITALS DORSET NHS FOUNDATION TRUST (UHD). IT'S A PROJECT THAT HAS BEEN MADE POSSIBLE THANKS TO INNOVATIVE TECHNOLOGIES AND CLOSE COLLABORATION WITH KEY SUPPLIERS MKN AND KI-TECH SOLUTIONS.

As part of a major reconfiguration programme, the Trust, which includes the Royal Bournemouth, Poole and Christchurch Hospitals, has invested in a new, state-of-the-art CPK in Bournemouth. The unit is already delivering meals for the Royal Bournemouth Hospital, with Poole and Christchurch set to follow.

The CPK will enable the Trust to continue to deliver a scalable patient catering model for up to 3,000 patient meals per day as the overall project progresses, across the three sites which span a six-mile radius of the kitchen. In total, it will be required to produce around 20,000 meals each week for patients and retail services, once it is up to full capacity.

Emma Honnywill is UHD's Transformation Operational Manager, supporting facilities and catering projects. She explains: "The CPK is vital to support not only the reconfiguration programme across the Trust, but also to deliver improved quality, choice and flexibility of our food offerings for our patients, whilst reducing waste. As part of the department transformation, we needed the flow of the building to work more efficiently than the old facility, which we had outgrown, and to be able to produce enough dishes to meet our patients' needs – particularly when we complete the reconfiguration and upscale. It was evident we would need to re-site the kitchen and this allowed us, with significant investment from the new hospital

*"The CPK is vital ... to deliver improved quality, choice and flexibility of our food offerings for our patients, whilst reducing waste"*







programme scheme, to create a purpose-built kitchen."

From design through to installation, the Trust has worked with a number of partners and had regular meetings on site to bring the programme to life. "There has been a huge amount of collaboration which has really benefited this project, bringing expertise and knowledge to enhance the delivery," Emma adds.

"The meetings also allowed us to re-examine the plans, look at the space and consider where the equipment would be installed. The end result is a fantastic space, where our chefs and catering staff have really been able to buy-in to the project and familiarise themselves to support the transition."

#### NEW KIT

A suite of the latest cooking equipment from MKN is at the heart of the new CPK and UHD's transformed catering operation. Chefs have access to two FlexiChef multifunctional cooking appliances, five FlexiCombi combi ovens, two 200-litre multifunctional mixing kettles and two Optima 850 induction hobs.

The kitchen team works on a cook-freeze model, with batch cooking at scale which is then portioned, levelled, sealed and frozen within around 90 minutes. Regen trolleys are used to regenerate meals in a 90-minute cycle and deliver to wards.

Among the benefits realised by the new

*"The yield of some of the dishes has increased, cooking times are down and staff morale has been boosted"*

process, Emma confirms that the yield of some of the dishes has increased, cooking times are down and staff morale has been boosted. "The kitchen flow is better and, ultimately, it allows us to deliver a more sustainable, more efficient service than we could previously, and it is fully scalable as we continue to reconfigure across the Trust," she adds.

#### DELIVERING TIME SAVINGS

The new equipment is central to the efficiency and productivity of the CPK, and kitchen staff are appreciative of the benefits it is already bringing. For example, the versatility of the FlexiChef means it does the tasks that previously required numerous different pieces of cooking equipment, redefining processes from pressure cooking to boiling to shallow and deep-frying, and making almost anything possible with enhanced speed and efficiency.

The Trust uses a Team Unit, comprising two FlexiChefs (size 2 and size 3) to prepare everything from rice pudding to steak and kidney pie with up to 800 portions in a single batch.

CPK Manager Vikram Paunikar, says: "The benefits are instantly evident. When we used to use a bratt pan for meat dishes, we'd have a reduction of somewhere around 12-15% of every product. Now it's only 5-7% and the quality is absolutely brilliant because all the moisture is retained in the meat.

"That's even before we get on to the time savings – they're supersonic! FlexiChef has cut production time and increased my yield. Take a steak and kidney pie, which would have taken three to four hours to cook the steak. In the new FlexiChef, it just takes an hour, and that's in a bigger volume."

The 200-litre multifunctional mixing and stirring kettles are also delivering consistent food quality in less time by automating key processes that would previously have been

completed manually. Suitable for cooking, stirring, mashing and whipping with a range of accessories and a cook/chill option, these kettles make life easier in the CPK, freeing up both labour and cooking line capacity.

Complete with a 10-inch capacitive touchscreen for simple-to-use but advanced controls, MKN's calculations show that a 200-litre kettle can save £10 in labour costs for a single batch of 600 mashed potato portions, compared with a 200-litre boiling kettle.

David King is a chef in the new CPK, responsible for producing meals for up to 500 patients a day, plus staff. He says: "The kettles alone have changed my life because they've given me the balance back. They make everything so much easier that I can do my job quicker and get home earlier. I've got weekends off because there's less manual prepping, which makes me happier in my role and at home."

These kettles are also versatile. Capable of reaching a temperature of 125°C, they can be used for bolognese, chilli con carne and other meat sauces, and chefs are also using them for more delicate dishes such as rice pudding and the sauce for a chicken and ham pie. Consistency is assured because the cooking programme is already there and ready to use.

"Has it made life easier? It certainly has – we can simply put products in, then walk away and start another job. Instead of just standing there doing one job at a time, we can have two or three jobs on the go, which speeds things up significantly," David adds.

#### **ENHANCED CAPACITY AND EASIER CLEANING**

The FlexiCombi combi steamers bring enhanced cooking capacity and consistent results. The FlexiRack capacity concept offers over 50% more capacity than appliances using conventional GN1/1 size – so only one cooking cycle may be necessary instead of two, which inevitably saves costs. In practical terms, this means up to 40 jacket potatoes will cook on one tray, consistently.

Other key features include DynaSteam, which automatically adjusts the steam volume to optimise cooking results and water efficiency during the WaveClean automatic cleaning process.



The FlexiCombis are also connected to the Grease Collection system, which achieves 99% separation of recyclable cooking liquids, pumping excess oil, fats and liquids into a separate container for collection. The waste can then be sold to other industries such as biofuel and cosmetics to drive additional income and boost the circular economy whereby recycling companies require different waste for different by-products.

#### **ELECTRICAL CHALLENGES**

Insufficient capacity in local power supply as the UK transitions away from traditional fossil fuels to electric kitchens is a growing challenge. Ki-Tech Solutions was invited to review the potential load of the kitchen during the design process and immediately identified a shortfall between what was available what was required.

Ki-Tech Solutions is the sole UK partner for the Sicotronic energy optimisation system, which was developed to overcome the issue of peak power demand and capacity in commercial kitchens. It balances

the load to meet peak power demand with a lower electrical supply than would be anticipated from the initial project designs, whilst also helping to future-proof the kitchen for any future expansion. All MKN appliances in the CPK at the Royal Bournemouth Hospital are connected to the Sicotronic system.

Co-founding Director of Ki-Tech Solutions, Richard Fordham explains: "We also have the infrastructure cabling in place to connect the utensil washer for additional future-proofing. This means the kitchen can operate with complete confidence and with a lower electrical supply than would be anticipated from the initial project designs."

In addition, Sicotronic is capable of delivering data which helps the caterer to make operational decisions based on real-time system performance. It is possible to see how long an appliance has been turned on for, consuming power and what its actual thermal (cooking activity) is.

This operational hours study can then be used to assess how equipment is used more efficiently, reducing wasted energy and ultimately cutting operational costs.

#### **A BIG HIT**

All in all, UHD's new CPK is a big hit with staff. "The team is absolutely loving the new facility – they are very enthusiastic and we're delighted with the results," Vikram enthuses. 🍴

*"It balances the load to meet peak power demand with a lower electrical supply than would be anticipated from the initial project designs"*



# ENHANCING DYSPHAGIA CARE THROUGH NUTRITION

NEW INNOVATIONS FOR WORLD LEADING RANGE

**Expanding on an already extensive range of texture modified meals, apetito has launched a new and improved world-leading range of Level 4 Purée meals designed to bring joy and dignity back to mealtimes for those living with dysphagia.**

Maia Fergus-O'Grady, Dietitian and Senior Category Executive for Specialist Nutrition at apetito speaks on the innovations to the range and how this has provided a step-change in the texture modified offering:

"After listening closely to customer feedback and preferences, we have made some significant changes to our Purée range to greatly improve our offering for patients. One key refinement has been bringing all our Puréed dishes into the smaller 'Purée Petite' portion size that are still packed full of flavour and meet the BDA guidelines for 'Energy Dense'.

"We understand that this smaller portion size is much more manageable for those living with dysphagia and therefore the preferable option for most of our end consumers, as well as ensuring those with smaller appetites are receiving sufficient nutritional intake – something crucially important for recovery in hospital.

"Another important update is improving on the allergens within the meals by making several of our Purée dishes gluten-free and 11 now made without all 14 recognised allergens\*. This gives a wider range of variety for patients with specialist dietary needs and helps hospitals to have wider menu choice. Despite this simplification in ingredient lists, we are confident that this has been achieved without compromising on any of the fantastic flavours.

"Further enhancing the mealtime experience for patients has also been a focus for us, and so we've taken the step

of incorporating more puréed sauces and gravies into the range to elevate the flavours across our texture-modified meals.

"In addition to this, we have also introduced an array of new side dishes to some of the meals, including sweetcorn and green beans, that are typically considered 'higher risk' and difficult to blend in a domestic kitchen. We're really proud to be making these vegetables accessible to those living with dysphagia.

"Operationally for the catering teams in hospitals, the majority of the new and improved meals are compatible with the iWave, increasing the number of products that can be prepared using multiple regeneration methods and supporting on ease of preparation.

"We are confident that our improved range of Purée meals will allow hospitals to provide patients with dysphagia with a safe and even more varied meal provision that

not only continues to support their recovery with good nutrition, but importantly brings enjoyment back to their dining experience."

As part of this range regeneration, apetito have introduced five brand-new Purée meals into its Level 4 range, including a Purée Chicken Korma, Purée Fish Pie, Purée Bean Chilli and two potato-topped pies, Purée Cottage Pie, and Purée Shepherd's Pie. This launch also features 12 revamped Purée meals, with improvements that mark an exciting evolution for the world-leading range that is created in line with IDDSI guidance.

To find out more about services from apetito, visit [apetito.link/HFS](https://apetito.link/HFS)

*\* Please note that "Made Without" does not mean "Free From". Made without means that the identified ingredient is not part of the recipe, but very small amounts could be present. The intended purpose is to enable the avoidance of an ingredient disliked due to its taste or texture. Food 'made without' an ingredient may not be suitable for someone living with food hypersensitivity.*



# SAFETY-FIRST CULTURE

THE INQUEST HAS RECENTLY BEEN HELD INTO THE DEATH OF A 13-YEAR OLD GIRL WITH A SEVERE DAIRY ALLERGY WHO WAS SERVED A HOT CHOCOLATE WITH MILK AT A WELL-KNOWN HIGH STREET COFFEE STORE. AS SUCH FATALITIES CONTINUE TO HAPPEN, HFS EXAMINES HOW HOSPITAL CATERERS CAN MEET THEIR RESPONSIBILITY TO SERVE FOOD THAT IS SAFE, NUTRITIOUS AND AIDS PATIENT RECOVERY IN AN INCREASINGLY COMPLEX ARENA.

**Around 6% of the UK adult population have a food allergy. This is according to a report from the Food Standards Agency, 'Patterns and Prevalence of Adult Food Allergy' (PAFA) published in May 2024. This equates to some 2.4 million adults. As well as the prevalence of allergy, this report also establishes that many childhood allergies persist into early adulthood, and around half are developed in later adulthood. The PAFA report is enhancing the understanding of how allergies evolve between childhood and adulthood, along with other valuable insights, including some more worrying trends.**

Professor Robin May, Chief Scientific Advisor at the Food Standards Agency says: "Through this research we can see patterns such as the emergence of plant-based allergies affecting more people into adulthood, which is important for us to consider as we've seen the food system move towards plant-based diets and alternative proteins."

### TRAINING

"Exemplary food hygiene and a strong food safety culture is vital when preparing food for allergy or intolerance sufferers," says Clare Grantham of The Safer Food Group, pointing out that for hospital caterers there is no 'opt-out' from preparing allergen-free food. "All patients require food that sustains and aids recovery, and doesn't cause harm."

The Safer Food Group's relaunched Level 2 Food Hygiene course describes three key elements that must be built firmly into the food production process in order to keep food allergy-safe: using safe ingredients, safe food preparation methods and creating a safe food environment.

Supplier management is key to ingredient safety. No internal systems and processes



*"No internal systems and processes can be effective if supplied ingredients are already contaminated with allergens"*

can be effective if supplied ingredients are already contaminated with allergens. This stage highlights the importance of using (or implementing, if not in place) comprehensive supplier audits as part of the FSMS or HACCP system – including a failsafe method of highlighting product or ingredient substitutions and incorporating these into menus with full transparency.

Any hospital catering environment should already be using scrupulous food preparation methods that prevent cross contamination. As well as considering the spread of pathogenic bacteria originating from high-risk foods, food handlers must also consider the potential movement

of allergens from one food or surface to another. This is where great care must be taken, and the highest possible controls used, because some allergenic ingredients can be spread through airborne particles – for example peanuts. Food preparation in total isolation from allergens may be required. Remember too that allergens are not destroyed by cooking, and may be retained in cooking oils, gluten for instance. Effective cleaning is a key tool in the prevention of cross contamination. Unlike pathogens, sanitisers and disinfectants do not denature allergens – washing at high temperatures with industrial detergents is the only safe method of elimination.



Ensuring the right food with the right ingredients gets to the right patient is vital. Information about ingredients must be available to the patient – or a qualified advocate – when choosing menus, bearing in mind that any food can be an allergen, not just the 14 listed foods. Careful labelling and delivery of allergy-free foods is the last vital step.

“It is important that everyone involved, from produce buyer to catering assistant, and chef to healthcare assistant, understands their role in managing allergens throughout food production to keep patients safe. A strong food safety culture includes offering good quality training, at an appropriate level that truly drives good practice,” Clare says.

Quality of food safety training can vary, so her advice before investing in training is to ensure it is comprehensible and at the right level for each team member. It also needs to be engaging – perhaps using tools such as videos and quizzes – simple to retain and practical, with a syllabus that relates to practice, particularly for operational roles such as food handlers and catering assistants.

The Safer Food Group has reconsidered its syllabus to concentrate on the subjects that will enable staff members to understand their food safety roles and responsibilities. Its Allergy Level 2 and Level 3 courses are written for food handlers and supervisors respectively – and the accessible content, with input from NHS Trusts, teaches the practical skills and knowledge required for

safe food production. Courses feature video presentations, engaging visuals and a broad range of accessibility features.

### NEAR-MISS REPORTING

According to HAS UK, this is an often overlooked but vital aspect of managing food allergies and intolerances. A near miss occurs when an error or potential issue is caught before it reaches the patient, offering valuable insights into system weaknesses. By incorporating near-miss reporting into hospital practices, especially through DATIX (an incident reporting system widely used in healthcare), hospitals can significantly improve patient safety outcomes. Documenting such events through near-miss reports can help improve processes, reduce the risk of serious allergic reactions, and guide staff training.

In the context of food allergy and intolerance, near misses might include incorrectly labelling meals, cross contamination in food preparation and miscommunication between the kitchen and ward about a patient’s dietary needs. By integrating them into a reporting system, with clear steps for documenting, investigating and correcting errors, the hospital can track, analyse and learn from these events to prevent future incidents.

Near-miss reporting can also help hospitals to track incidents involving less common allergens – those sitting outside of the top 14 – such as pea protein and

maize (corn), which are increasingly found in plant-based and gluten free products. By documenting these issues, hospitals can identify patterns of recurring issues with certain ingredients, and adjust menus or supplier choices to avoid those allergens.

Miscommunication between the kitchen and ward staff is one of the main causes of near misses in hospitals. Implementing systems like coloured trays or plates to identify allergy-friendly meals can reduce the risk of confusion. For example, a red tray could signify a meal prepared for a patient with a food allergy, helping ward staff easily distinguish it from others.

Regular training and clear, written communication channels between departments are essential to ensuring that everyone knows a patient’s dietary needs. Near misses should also be seen as learning opportunities, allowing staff to refine communication practices.

### TAKING ALLERGENS OUT OF THE MIX

The advice from several sector suppliers is to remove unnecessary allergens for all, which also increases the meal options for allergy sufferers. “A key piece of advice would be to simplify the ingredients used in menu development,” says Samantha Mollart, Senior Allergen and Nutrition Manager at Bidfood. This could be achieved by switching to an oil-based spread to remove dairy in food like sandwiches, she suggests, or switching stocks and gravies to gluten free alternatives that are also free of the top 14 allergens.

Louise Wagstaffe, Senior Culinary Advisor for Premier Foods agrees. “One of the most popular accompaniments and a much-loved staple in UK hospitals – and households for that matter – is gravy. Allergen-free alternatives that don’t compromise on taste or texture, are the perfect solution for

*“Near misses should also be seen as learning opportunities, allowing staff to refine communication practices”*



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hospitals catering to various, and sometimes more complex, dietary needs.”

Bisto, Premier’s bestselling stock, is available in Bisto Bouillon and Reduced Salt Gravy Granules, as well as Bisto Gluten Free Gravy to deliver the same taste whilst allowing hospitals to cater for those who require a gluten free meal. Another suggestion is the new range of McDougalls Vegan jelly crystals, which are allergen-free, convenient to use and available in Orange, Strawberry and Raspberry flavours.

Major International is also committed to supporting its customers with a wide range of free-from ingredients, all of which are clearly labelled. “Many of our stocks, sauces and gravies are ‘no allergens to declare’, meaning our customers know they can rely on us to deliver exceptional flavour, texture and taste with added peace-of-mind. Almost our entire range of products are gluten free, making them suitable for coeliacs, and are made in a state-of-the-art, nut-free site. Many are also certified as vegetarian and vegan,” explains Marketing Manager Paul Saunders.

“For ease and quick identification, our packaging is clearly labelled with all relevant allergy information and our website contains a handy, downloadable suitability chart for further information. The chefs’ base suitability chart is an easy-to-read guide which gives all the allergen and dietary information for the current range of Major products in one place.”

Major International also prides itself on a pioneering approach to product development, a good example of which is the addition of Vitamin D to its Gluten Free Gravy. “As one of the biggest deficiencies to be aware of



MAJOR INTERNATIONAL'S GLUTEN FREE GRAVY NOW WITH ADDED VITAMIN D

## *“The advice from several sector suppliers is to remove unnecessary allergens for all”*

in hospitals, Vitamin D is essential to an individual’s physical, emotional and social health,” Paul continues. “Contributing to healthy bones, facilitating hormone regulation, managing blood sugar levels, enhancing the immune system, improving heart health and supporting concentration and memory, Vitamin D is vital. The Major Gluten Free Instant Gravy Granules with Vitamin D can deliver as much as 40% of the recommended daily intake of Vitamin D per portion.”

### **TAKING THE TIME TO PLAN**

As well as removing unnecessary allergens, Bidfood’s Samantha Mollart suggests a number of other measures as part of a “systematic and committed approach.” Provide at least one option on the menu that can cater for each of the more common

dietary requirements, such as gluten free, nut free and dairy free. Signpost on menus where a free-from option is available and standardise recipes as best practice. “Know exactly what is going into each meal so that no rogue ingredients or garnishes are added on a different day by a different member of staff,” she recommends. “In addition to this, if food is not used immediately, batch coding and dating portions should be used to trace back if required.”

Also be clear with patients and provide them with a simple statement along the lines of ‘more information regarding food allergens is available on request, please ask your ward host/hostess/nurse’. This will encourage them to ask. Similar messages implemented in retail and in staff and visitor restaurants can initiate clear communication on an individual’s dietary needs.

### **KNOW ALLERGENS LIKE THE BACK OF YOUR HAND**

All staff who are handling food must be aware of the rules surrounding allergens and the institution’s policy on food allergen management. Training must also be appropriate to the role of the person undertaking the task and providing the service, so that staff can be confident in their ability to deliver safe food. Samantha points out that the national standards for healthcare food and drink, now incorporated into the NHS standard contract, require all staff who may come into contact with food to receive training in food allergies and the importance of avoiding cross contamination.

“There are many different avenues for training, but looking for support from an accredited or clinically reviewed training programme is always best,” she advises.



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"For example, Anaphylaxis UK offers online training courses for healthcare professionals that are suitable for those involved in patient care on the ward.

"Any allergen policy should incorporate all touch points for the delivery of safe food to the end consumer. Not just considering practices for food preparation, but looking at the whole system, from procurement to the processes for ordering dietary requirements, and finally, the delivery to the ward or restaurant."

### ELIMINATING HUMAN ERROR

On the ward, the 'last nine yards' of service is crucial to delivering safe food. "Ward-level allergy management starts with how a person's dietary requirements are tracked and processed," Samantha explains. "This includes how the information is being sent down to the kitchen. Digital meal ordering that can mark an individual's dietary requirements is a safer way to ensure this information isn't lost when sent to the kitchen.

"Consideration also needs to be made for how the food is then delivered to the patient on the ward. Make sure you clearly label dishes with a sticker or label to state who the dish is suitable for as it reduces the risk of the wrong dish being given to someone with a different dietary requirement. Popping a cover over your dishes will also help prevent cross-contamination with other food being delivered on the ward."

In the kitchen, removing allergens on the menu will help to minimise the risk of cross contamination. If possible separate food prep areas should also be established, extending to the equipment used as well, such as chopping boards and knives. "Never place allergen-free food where other allergy-containing food has previously been used," Samantha warns.

"Safe storage practices are also vital to avoid cross contamination on foodstuffs. Keep food items in sealed containers and only use clean utensils to measure out ingredients. And where you can, place allergic ingredients like nuts, milk powder and wheat flour on the bottom shelves to prevent ingredients from leaking or falling into other food."

### A HELPING HAND FROM TECHNOLOGY

Digital meal ordering solutions are one example of where technology can reduce the risk of unsuitable meals being served to a patient who has an allergy. Recipe analysis software solutions are another. These can be a great tool to map out allergens being used in the kitchen and what ends up in the final dish. "Many now have clear labelling and icons



*"All staff who are handling food must be aware of the rules surrounding allergens and the institution's policy on food allergen management"*

for allergens that may be present or have a risk of cross contamination at a product level. These recipe tools also help to keep allergen information on products as up-to-date as possible, whereas printed recipe information is static at that point in time," Samantha explains.

Bidfood's free MyRecipes and Menu Planning tool is available through its online shop, Bidfood Direct. This allows customers to access allergen data, so when they're planning menus they can get sight of clear and easy-to-understand allergen icons, which automatically update should there be any change to their recipes.

### CLEAN AND ALLERGEN-AWARE


"From preparing and cooking food through to serving it, maintaining a clean and allergen-aware kitchen is paramount in preventing cross contamination," says Premier Foods' Louise Wagstaffe. She outlines a number of actions to prevent cross contamination with allergens:

- Thoroughly clean utensils, chopping boards, pots, pans and work surfaces before each use, especially if they have been used to prepare meals containing allergens
- Wash hands thoroughly between preparing dishes
- Store ingredients and prepare foods separately in closed and labelled containers

- Keep ingredients that contain allergens separate from other ingredients
- Use new oil to cook allergen-free recipes. "Caterers and staff should be vigilant in monitoring ingredient changes in the products they use and should work closely with suppliers to ensure they are made aware of any ingredient modifications," Louise adds. "This allows them to adapt quickly to ensure menus remain allergen-friendly."

Whilst focusing on allergies, it can be easy to overlook the nutritional value of a dish or menu. Louise advises hospital caterers to collaborate with nutritionists or dietitians to ensure allergen-friendly menus also meet the nutritional needs of patients.

### HERE TO STAY

As the number of people suffering with a dietary allergy or intolerance continues to increase, and incidents persist where a person has suffered a severe or even fatal response to food or drink they have been served, hospital caterers must maintain vigilance on this most critical of subjects. 

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# CONVENIENT & CONSISTENT

or **apetito**, developing lower carbon choices is one of the key focuses, and an essential step towards achieving net zero targets. Clearly, this often aligns with more plant-based offerings, but not always, and at all times meeting the nutritional needs of patients is a top priority. “Much of our focus has been on looking at our ingredients and how to develop lower carbon meals that still meet the dietary needs of our customers,” explains **apetito’s**

“However, it is essential that we ensure we develop nutritionally dense meals, and for many, meats remain a dominant factor in their meal choices. Therefore, identifying meats with lower carbon emissions and developing meals based around these is key for consumer enjoyment and sustainability.”

"As a specialist caterer that creates meals for people in hospitals, we have to ensure that we support a range of diets, so we have been providing meat alternatives and plant



forward dishes for some time. We are now working to enhance plant-based, vegan and vegetarian offers even further, so we are incorporating more into our menus.”

Simply Food Solutions (SFS) aims to ensure it always has a good range of vegan and vegetarian options, providing variety across all of its product ranges, including all levels of texture-modified meals.

It uses a lot of beans and pulses within its dishes to increase the protein content, especially for vegan and vegetarian dishes, choosing only naturally occurring protein and not formulated protein powders, finding the powders can affect the taste and texture of its meals. This is especially important in the Simply Puree texture-modified range as meals need to be as flavoursome and tasty as possible to reduce the possibility of the patient rejecting the food and therefore not getting any protein into their diet.

NH Case notes a sustained focus on nutrition to encourage recovery and healing, and promote good health across healthcare. Foods with good quality protein that are high in fibre are at the forefront of what dietitians and patients are looking for, with salt, sugar and dietary fat kept to recommended levels. The prepared meals sector has met this demand, with clear declaration of ingredients and reduced salt and sugar levels.

### TACKLING PACKAGING

Pre-prepared meals generate necessary packaging, but suppliers are taking steps to mitigate the impact of their single-use packaging and encourage more recycling. Simply Food Solutions uses CPET trays that can be washed and recycled according to each location’s recycling procedures.

All packaging used by NH Case is recycled, and the company encourages customers to

*“Caterers should ensure they are working with suppliers who are prioritising sustainable sourcing and higher environmental standards”*



*“Foods with good quality protein that are high in fibre are at the forefront of what dietitians and patients are looking for”*

recycle wherever possible. It is in the process of trialling some alternative biodegradable trays. As technology improves, alternative packaging made from compostable materials, such as bagasse (sugarcane fibre), bamboo, moulded pulp, or mushroom mycelium will provide an environmentally-friendly alternative to conventional packaging. These materials break down naturally and can be composted alongside organic waste. Seaweed plastic is made with nothing but plant-based materials, which means it’s completely biodegradable. Once packaging can be made to survive the cooking temperatures and ensure there is no leakage, NH Case believes the current reliance on plastic will diminish.

apetito has created a closed-loop recycling scheme for its plastic meal trays on an industrial scale. NHS customers wash out their used CPET trays and return them to the apetito driver on the next meal delivery. These are then sent back to the recycling partner, flaked down and formed into brand-new trays for apetito meals, thus closing the recycling loop. Furthermore, every stage takes place right here in the UK.

“Since launching this scheme into the NHS in 2023 we have already recycled over one million meal trays from participating hospitals and are continuing to expand the initiative with our customers month-on-month, helping the NHS on its own journey to Net Zero by 2040,” says Lee Sheppard, apetito Director of Corporate Affairs, Policy and Sustainability. “Our Training and Operations team has provided training to ‘on the ground’ staff of participating sites in order to further their understanding of the positive impact of

this system and drive up overall engagement with the scheme across NHS sites.”

apetito also uses durable and reusable red plastic crates to deliver meals to NHS customers, mitigating the use of cardboard boxes that have a lesser lifespan.

### REDUCING SCOPE 3 EMISSIONS

Packaging also has an impact on scope 3 emissions – that huge proportion of carbon that is embedded in the supply chain. Lee suggests caterers could look to work with suppliers that have environmentally-friendly packaging for their products, and/or who minimise their use of packaging. “Working with suppliers who use packaging that is recyclable rather than single-use plastics, and don’t send huge amounts of unnecessary packaging with each delivery, is going to help reduce levels of plastic waste,” he says. Similarly, look to suppliers with their own closed-loop system, or those who might be willing to work collaboratively on developing similar innovative solutions.

Packaging, however, is only one aspect of reducing scope 3 emissions, and Lee stresses it is important that suppliers are transparent about their own carbon footprint. Caterers should ensure they are working with suppliers who are prioritising sustainable sourcing and higher environmental standards, and importantly that they can provide transparency and tracing for all their ingredients used. Check that they can provide information on emissions associated with all elements of their business, such as supply chain, production and distribution, and have clear plans in place to reduce these emissions – such as a validated Net Zero commitment.





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Caterers could also consider how suppliers may support them in reducing food waste, making sure that they offer portion-controlled meals to prevent too much surplus waste at serving time.

“Focusing on these areas can help caterers to make informed decisions about pre-prepared meal suppliers that are going to actively contribute to a reduction in scope 3 emissions, whilst still ensuring high quality food,” Lee says.

Simply Food Solutions suggests consolidating orders as much as possible and using wholesalers to achieve this. Over the last year it has increased listings with new suppliers, such as Thomas Ridley, to make its products widely accessible to customers.

Efficiency in supply chains is key for NH Case. Reducing waste, effective route planning and managing energy and water consumption are all critical to reducing scope 3 emissions for customers. All deliveries are made using reusable trays so as not to leave unnecessary packaging on site. Pack sizes vary from one to eight portions so that plate waste can be better managed at ward level. NH Case works with customers to improve storage to reduce the number of deliveries and thus unnecessary food miles. The company fleet is 25% hybrid or fully electric and will expand as technology develops. With solar panels installed in all sites, NH Case has reduced its externally generated electricity purchases by approximately 38%, and between April and October sites run exclusively site-generated solar electricity between 7am and 5pm.

### CATERING FOR COMPLEX NEEDS

When catering for patients with allergies and intolerances, those with dysphagia or those requiring higher protein, calories and energy dense meals, many hospitals



*“Pre-prepared meals can be a convenient and reassuring solution for caterers needing to cater to individuals with complex dietary needs”*

choose the peace of mind, convenience and consistency that comes with buying-in pre-prepared meals and snacks. “Pre-prepared meals can be a convenient and reassuring solution for caterers needing to cater to individuals with complex dietary needs. Pre-prepared meals will have specific dietary codings based on their nutritional composition, making it easy for healthcare professionals and their patients to make meal choices based on their nutritional needs,” says Sophia Cornelius. “Making texture-modified meals comes with an array of challenges. Of upmost importance is ensuring the meal is safe and compliant with the recommended IDDSI level, however, taste, presentation and nutrition are also vital components to ensure the meal is eaten and enjoyed while providing vital nutrients to support wellbeing and recovery.”

Simply Food Solutions sat on the board of expert manufacturers when IDDSI was set up and has maintained a good close working relationship with it ever since, to ensure that products are always compliant with guidelines.

It has equipment built specifically to ensure its texture-modified meals hit the texture requirements of each IDDSI level, and its ingredients are selected to ensure it can meet the level 5 and 6 sizing guidelines during every production.

Using organoleptic testing to test products to IDDSI criteria ensures

compliance of particle size and consistency. Meals are made in a manufacturing environment to strict set recipes for each level, which further increases product safety.

Simply Food Solutions also offers an Allergen Aware range of meals, made without the presence of all 14 main allergens, within its Simply Healthcare product range.

Within the Steamplicity range, a separate allergy menu is available to cater for people with specific intolerances. Almost 50% of the menu is gluten free and many meals are also free from the other major allergens. The roast chicken dish is free from all 14 of the main allergens.

Some Steamplicity recipes have also been developed to be higher in energy and protein, making them particularly suitable for patients who are nutritionally vulnerable. “These dishes play an important role in patients’ nutritional care,” John Harvey explains. “It is often said that food not eaten has no nutritional value, so we must ensure these dishes are also tasty, popular choices that patients will want to eat, thereby ensuring optimal nutritional intake. We annotate these high energy, high protein dishes on the menu to make them easier for at risk patients to find and select.”

**apetito.co.uk**  
**compass-group.co.uk**  
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BIODEGRADABLE PLASTIC ALTERNATIVE, MADE FROM ALGAE - IS THIS THE FUTURE FOR FOOD PACKAGING?





# FARM TO FORK

WHAT STEPS DO HOSPITAL CATERERS NEED TO TAKE TO IMPROVE SUSTAINABILITY OF THEIR FOOD PROCUREMENT? HFS EXPLORES BRITISH SUPPLY CHAINS, SEASONALITY, MENU CHANGES AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE GOVERNMENT.

**Perhaps the first step for any caterer is to develop closer relationships with suppliers. "Get as close to suppliers and procurement functions as possible," is the advice of Rees Bramwell, Compass One's Sustainability Director. "In foodservice, supply chains can feel long, but open communication is the key to reducing the distance from farm to fork. I find that chefs are hugely passionate about British produce, seasonality and increasingly knowledgeable about sustainability. Harnessing their skill and creativity to overcome potential barriers, such as cost, to prioritise great quality ingredients is a good strategy."**

Danny Raleigh, General Manager of West Country Milk, elaborates on this theme. Don't be fooled by the name, West Country Milk is neither confined to the West Country, nor to the supply of milk. Although based in Devon, it supplies a range of products, including chilled dairy, fresh fruit and vegetables, bread, meat and poultry, on a regional and national basis working with independent producers and supply partners across the country. Danny stresses that open conversations are essential if caterers want to adopt regional and British supplier relationships. "Holding suppliers at arm's length is not productive – close relationships are necessary to understand each other's capabilities and needs, as well as where a better procurement option might be available. This could even save the Trust

*"Open conversations are essential if caterers want to adopt regional and British supplier relationships"*

money, especially where a long-term supply arrangement has been in place. Closing the doors is not the way to bring about improvements. Farm and producer visits are a really good way of meeting local suppliers and understanding what they can do for you."

Lee Sheppard, Director of Corporate Affairs, Policy and Sustainability at apetito UK, cautions against fixating on developing 'regional' relationships. "When looking at UK farming geography, it would become an impossibility to source all ingredients on a regional basis, and that is before you factor in patients that may have specialist dietary requirements or cultural preferences where supply is more limited," he says.

"The focus should be on building relationships with British suppliers and supporting our food and farming industry as a whole – we don't need to source any more locally than that! Looking to establish more personal connections with suppliers through visiting the sites is also important as this helps to build trust and likely leads to a more reliable partnership with high quality produce."

Working with suppliers helps encourage understanding of the provenance of the food

being purchased for patients. "At apetito, we value creating great food to be proud of and believe that starts at the source, which is why every year we spend much of our purchasing budget with British and Irish suppliers."

Recognising that developing relationships with British suppliers is not always easy, Mark Kassapian, Managing Director of Litmus Retail points out there are nevertheless many advantages with this approach. The Dynamic Procurement System (DPS) can help, and he also recommends looking at the dynamics of the local area and engaging with farmers and producers. This approach can reduce carbon emissions, result in healthier and seasonal food, and bring wider environmental impacts related to agriculture, transport, storage and waste across the supply chain and on the NHS estate.

"A good local relationship could also lead to better value with regards to pack sizes too," Mark suggests. "For example, farmers may be open to tailoring their meat pack sizes to suit specific requirements if there is a guarantee of a certain level of volume. This will result in pack sizes that work for defined requirements and result in less waste."



## SEASONALITY ON MENUS

"Many dynamic hospital caterers already include seasonal menu changes to take advantage of increased local/national fresh food availability and at better prices," Mark continues.

Here again, caterers will benefit from a close relationship with the supplier, good communication and involving the supplier in the planning process. Danny Raleigh explains: "If planning a summer menu with British soft fruits, you don't want to find out late in the day that there's been a failure in the crop. Involving the supplier in the planning process provides insight around which crops are going to be good in a particular year and which are not, enabling menus to be planned accordingly."

Lee Sheppard points out that patient menus are regularly reviewed to ensure choice, variety and avoid menu fatigue, and this is a good opportunity for caterers to consider the seasonality of products. "Understanding which products are more readily available in each season allows caterers to plan core menu items around these ingredients or change up the 'standard' recipes used to incorporate more seasonal ingredients," he says. Also remember that in a frozen meal solution, all the ingredients are harvested in-season and the freshness 'locked in', with the products available for patients to enjoy all year round.

Compass One hosts a seasonality guide on its central resource platform that chefs, nutritionists and sustainability leads can access. Fruit and vegetables can be interchanged at recipe level, particularly where dishes lend themselves to particular seasons. As an example, Rees Bramwell

suggests hearty stews in winter can be packed with root veg and brassicas, with lighter salads in summer including a variety of leafy greens and vibrant tomatoes, peppers, beetroot and other salad crops.

"In my experience people are open to caterers being bold on seasonality too, communicating when summer strawberries are switched for apples in autumn to prioritise British produce and superior flavour is a great story to tell," he adds.

## MENU CHANGES

Carbon reduction and a shift to plant-based food are the big items to consider. "Moving towards plant forward food offers is essential to mitigate the greenhouse gas emissions currently produced by the food system, but this needs to be done in a considered way," Rees continues. "Even more so in a hospital environment – whether feeding patients or staff – nutrition must be a priority, that is why our culinary, nutrition and sustainability teams collaborate to develop Medirest menus and also host 'reformulation forums' which aim to improve existing recipes across all fronts."

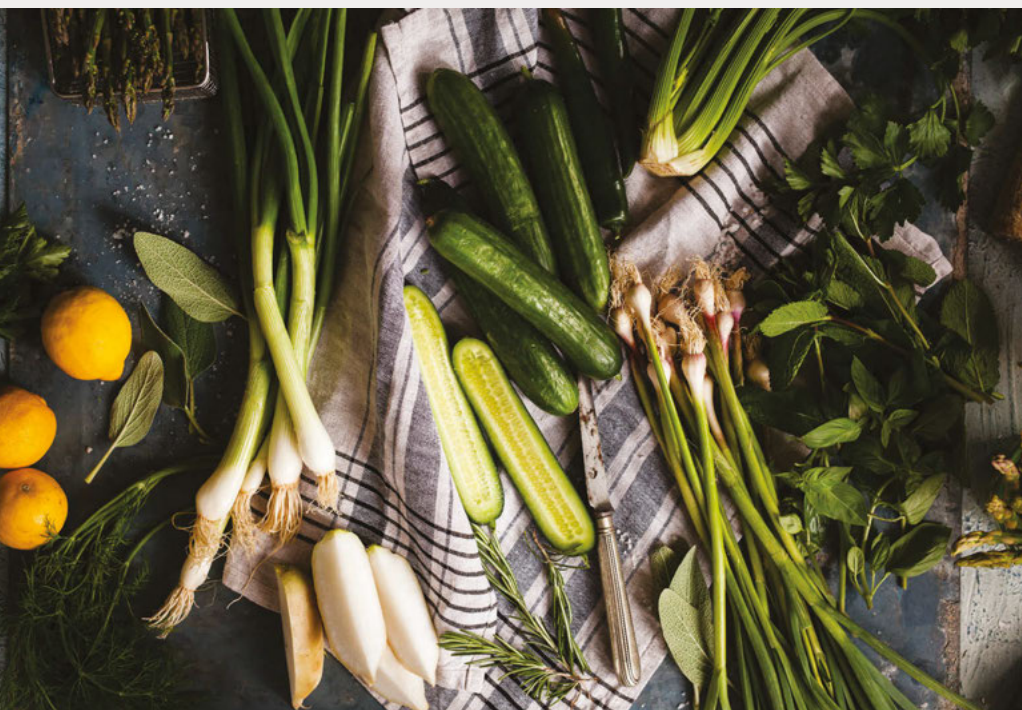
Whilst developing exciting plant-based meals is important – and over 40% of Steamplicity menus are now vegetarian and vegan – it's often the subtle changes to meat dishes that make the biggest impact, such as replacing small amounts of meat with a high quality, plant-based protein on high volume recipes. "There is also some great work being done at farm level, so a 'less and better' approach means mindful procurement of meat is important to satisfy where people have a preference for meat dishes."

West Country Milk has carried out an exercise to illustrate the benefits of a regional supply model. Basing its modelling on the requirements of a prospective client, as well as an existing one, the company mapped its supply chain back to individual farmers/producers, compared with that of the supply hubs of a national supplier. For the prospective client, the savings in food miles by adopting the regional supply model were into millions per year. The same exercise with a group of 32 coffee shops revealed an average of less than 30 food miles from farm to store with the regional supply model was possible. Such a procurement model provides good local provenance, fresh and good quality produce, invests in the local economy, supports SMEs, reduces food miles and allows the NHS to impact on scope 3 emissions and deliver social value in the contract.

Other environmental factors such as water stewardship, biodiversity loss and animal welfare should also be considered. Compass One is rolling out the Foodsteps system, which analyses the environmental impact of each dish. This will help people to make an informed decision when ordering food.

Menu changes that reduce the emphasis on animal-sourced foods not only align with a more sustainable food system but are also needed to improve health and nutrition. Matthew Unerman, Food Sustainability Manager at Compassion in World Farming tells Hospital F+S: "The over consumption of red and processed meats – driven by industrial animal farming – plays a significant role in increasing the risk of heart disease, obesity, diabetes and certain cancers.<sup>1</sup>

*"Fruit and vegetables can be interchanged at recipe level, particularly where dishes lend themselves to particular seasons"*





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## *“Utilising the power of ‘nudge theory’, even changing only two meals on a two-week cycle can have a significant positive impact”*

Moreover, industrial farming not only harms the environment but also seriously impacts the welfare of farmed animals.”

Diet is also a large risk factor in non-communicable chronic disease. It might shock readers to hear that unhealthy diets – those with too high a reliance on animal products and ultra processed foods – are the largest global burden of disease and pose a greater risk to morbidity and mortality than unsafe sex, and alcohol, drug and tobacco use combined.<sup>2</sup>

The ‘More Money More Meat’ report, produced by Compassion in World Farming last year, reveals how much different countries over consume animal-sourced foods and encourages healthier diets from sustainable food systems by 2050. The report goes beyond the UK’s National Food Strategy by including specific animal-sourced food reduction targets.

“Caterers must act independently to help meet these reduction targets and play their part in helping to educate and improve the diet and health of the population,” Matthew continues. “Hospitals, food businesses and caterers have the power to enforce positive change by revising their menus to reflect the need to reduce our global consumption of animal-sourced foods, increasing the

number of plant-based foods we eat whilst ensuring any meat, dairy and eggs used come from higher welfare sources. Hospital caterers should be leading the way in offering nutritious food to aid recovery and demonstrate to patients that healthy food can be appetising and accessible.”

It stands to reason that food produced closer to consumption tends to be fresher. “It doesn’t need the addition of preservatives to give it a longer life,” says Danny Raleigh. “This agenda is growing in strength, and we have to invest in our local supply chains. Farming is vulnerable, and farmland, once it’s been repurposed for something else, cannot be returned. So local provenance, investing in the community, supporting those producers by buying locally wherever you can, supports sustainability.”

Changing patient menus to reduce carbon emissions is another high-profile action that caterers need to consider. This can be achieved through making small, subtle changes to menus that reduce the use of red meat – which has a high carbon footprint – in favour of ingredients with a lower carbon footprint, such as poultry, fish or plant-based options. Lee Sheppard explains: “Utilising the power of ‘nudge theory’, even changing only two meals on a two-week cycle can have a

significant positive impact whilst patients will most likely not be aware that they are eating from a reduced carbon menu and will still have ample choice.”

apetito delivered the first reduced carbon menus into the NHS in 2022, working with partners MITIE and St George’s University Hospital in Tooting. Lee describes the results of this action as “extremely encouraging,” with a 17% fall in carbon emissions across the menu.

### **WHAT THE GOVERNMENT SHOULD DO NOW**

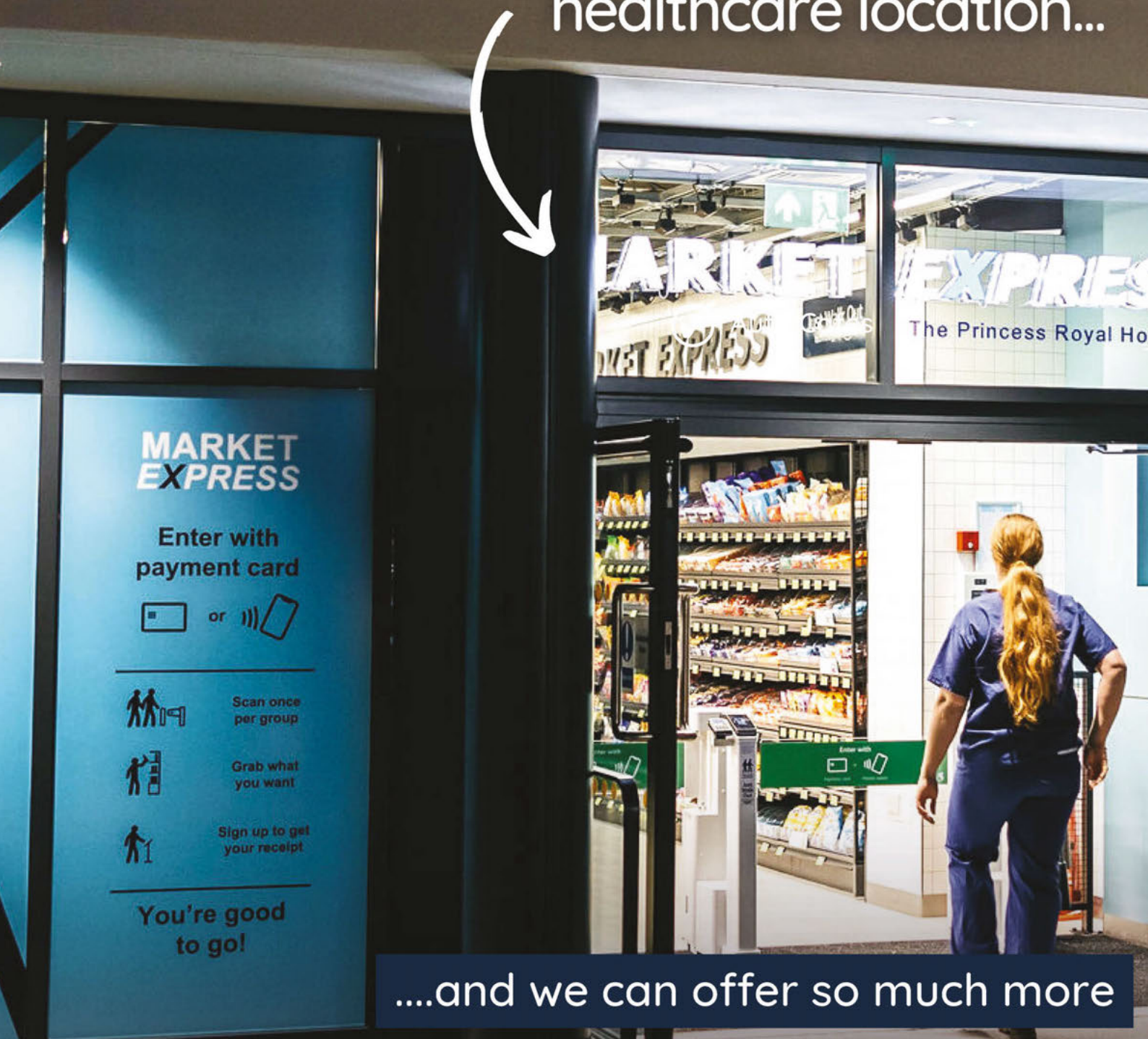
West Country Milk is a member of an advisory group set up under the former Government to incentivise and drive spend through SMEs across the public sector. Working with NHS England, this programme aims to help SMEs to overcome the challenges of supplying the NHS, such as how to get onto the framework. Driving progress on sustainable sourcing of food and drink by encouraging spend with SMEs is effective, and this work has been really positive.

However, Danny Raleigh points out that it’s important to remember that profitability is also key. “In farming in particular the financial model appears to be unsustainable, with consumer demand for low food prices leading to a high number of farmers quitting the industry every year. Finding a solution to this is a task the Government could address,” he says.

In addition, environmental challenges – particularly Net Zero – and their impact on British Farming are complex and not yet fully



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understood, for instance, relating to methane emissions from livestock or carbon emissions from the land itself. “As understanding improves, it’s becoming clearer that reality often does not match public perception. Some view farming as somehow ‘an environmental problem child’, yet we believe strongly that it forms a cornerstone opportunity for a sustainable future.

“There are some really exciting opportunities, for instance, with regenerative farming, but there is a lack of guidance or a framework within which individual businesses and farmers are able to assess and plan their own activities, measure themselves and their performance. The Government could do some really useful work here. It should also be remembered that regenerative farming requires investment by the farmer, and they may need some help – particularly at a time when the industry is already struggling.”

Educating and developing awareness are also necessary. “A few years ago, who even knew what regenerative farming was?” Danny poses. “This is changing, but there’s still a lack of knowledge and therefore understanding about its benefits and why procurement systems such as the NHS should seek to support it.”

Rees Bramwell also reflects on the complexity of the food industry, and the “huge opportunity” to make changes and have a positive impact, especially across the public sector. “I think a holistic focus across the food system value chain is required, for example at farm level offering incentives to sustainable production alongside clear standards and definitions that support a more consistent approach, such as on

## *“Hospitals, food businesses and caterers have the power to enforce positive change by revising their menus”*



regenerative agriculture. Then, as we get closer to consumption, providing frameworks that encourage transparency and simplify operational delivery where possible,” he says.

“There are already reporting standards in place, but considerable variation can make it extremely resource intensive. These are not simple tasks, but collaboration across the value chain can help accelerate the necessary change.”

Lee Sheppard stresses the imperative of understanding the current food system and supply chain. “When creating standards for sustainable sourcing of food and drink, the Government needs to consult thoroughly with industry to fully understand the food system and align with other key priorities of the sector to ensure they are fit for purpose. The standards must be focused on what actually ‘does good’, rather than simply what ‘looks good’, to become easily embedded in public sector procurement.”

Lee is critical of the proposals for the Government Buying Standards for Food and Catering, saying they have many flaws that suggest the Government is significantly out of touch and risks driving increased costs. “The new Government now needs to make timely decisions on these standards to promote a culture of sustainable procurement for the public sector. Following a consultation issued back in the summer of 2022, there has still been no response, and no new standards published. This is an opportunity for the new administration to make it clear that this

is a priority, and review what is proposed to ensure they ‘get it right’.”

For Mark Kassapian, leveraging the NHS Good Food standards and setting the tone with the NHS Supply Chain is the way forward. “If the Government can show that farmers and food producers can make money from sustainable food supply, then sustainable practices will flourish and more options and availability will arise,” he says.

“The DPS is a sound basis for suppliers to quote to all public sector contracts so if the Government can push the DPS to be more sustainable, perhaps with minimum standards or criteria around sustainability, then it can raise the bar for all.”

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**compass-group.co.uk**  
**litmuspartnership.co.uk/services/**  
**litmus-retail/**  
**wcmilk.co.uk**

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- <sup>2</sup> Health effects of dietary risks in 195 countries, 1990–2017: a systematic analysis for the Global Burden of Disease Study 2017. Published by the Lancet 2019





# WATER STRESS

WE TAKE IT FOR GRANTED, BUT THE WORLD IS HEADING FOR A WATER CRISIS, AND THE FOOD AND DRINK SUPPLY CHAIN, WHILST CONTRIBUTING TO THE PROBLEM, HAS MUCH TO LOSE FROM INACTION.

**We can't produce food without water, but in spite of the deluge much of the country has suffered in recent weeks, future predictions of water supplies are stark.**

Agricultural supply chains use 70% of global freshwater resources, and the UN predicts that global demand for fresh water will exceed supply by 40% by 2030. That's a date that is too close for comfort. The situation is exacerbated by extreme weather events caused by climate change.

The UK imports more than 80% of its fruit and 40% of its vegetables, mostly from countries that are already water-stressed, such as southern Europe. WRAP has urged that action is needed and published its Water Roadmap in 2021 as a key implementation framework for the Courtauld Commitment 2030 water target – that 50% of the UK's fresh food is sourced from areas with sustainable water management. Signatories to the Courtauld Commitment are mostly large retailers, food producers and foodservice businesses. However, every foodservice business, large or small, can look to become more water-efficient, take water scarcity seriously, and reduce operating costs at the same time.

As Paul Anderson, Managing Director of Meiko UK says in The Footprint Sustainability Index 2024, published by Footprint

*“Every foodservice business, large or small, can look to become more water-efficient, and take water scarcity seriously”*

Intelligence and Nestlé Professional: “You haven't got access to free water. You pay for it all the time, no matter how much has dropped from the sky.”

Catering operations are big users of water – producing food is thirsty work – but reducing water waste in the kitchen doesn't have to be complicated. The Sustainable Restaurant Association SRA recommends the starting point for any food business or catering operator must be to measure use and understand current usage patterns, by conducting a water audit. This will also highlight areas for improvement.

### WRAP ROADMAP

The WRAP 'Roadmap towards Water Security for Food & Drink Supply' includes a checklist of good practice to manage and reduce water use in commercial kitchens, developed by the Foodservice Equipment Association (FEA).

**Equipment:** Suggestions include specifying hands-free basins or automatic taps for hand-washing stations, water saving

diffusers or valves on taps with inbuilt flow-limiting devices or aerators to reduce water use, flow control devices that automatically control running time and temperature, and fitting a thermostatic valve if mixed water temperature is essential. Make sure sink bowls are appropriately sized and fitted with drain plugs. Floor cleaning machines can reduce water use and be more effective at lifting debris.

In the warewashing operation, ensure pre-rinsing of small wares to extend cleanliness of the water tank, review rinsing practices and use a spray arm for lightly soiled items, and make sure all trays are fully loaded to maximise efficiency of water – and energy – per cycle. When designing the kitchen, calculate the correct size of warewashing equipment to avoid over/under filling, which leads to inefficient use of water, and select equipment that has the minimum operating water consumption for the operational requirements.

**Practices and preparation:** Plan defrosting cycles safely under refrigeration






to avoid use of rapid running water and consider a double sink method for washing vegetables, that is, removing debris in sink one, with final rinse in sink two.

**Cooking:** Consider steaming vegetables instead of boiling and choose equipment capable of measuring and delivering just the required amount of water. This also helps conserve energy. Choose automated steam combi ovens, and bratt pans and boiling kettles that automatically modulate cooking temperatures and processes. This will ensure there is no burning or sticking which reduces the amount of water needed for cleaning. When using self-cleaning, rather than opting for a full clean, choose the mode most appropriate to need or eco mode whenever possible. Try to use slow and low cooking methods that avoid rapid boiling, braising and moisture loss.

**Water treatment:** Get water checked so that the right treatment system is used to match the needs of the equipment. Make sure water softeners are set up correctly and use a high-efficiency valve to minimise waste. Reverse osmosis must use a high-quality membrane and monitor the percentage of water that goes to the drain in the process. Carefully consider all water treatment and process systems to ensure minimal consumption, unless for a critical application.

**Staff training & awareness:** Ensure staff are trained in water conservation. Display visible reminders about how to conserve water around the kitchen. If manual taps are used, train staff on how to use them efficiently, for instance, minimising the time running and turning them off properly. Introduce dry-wiping of plates and pans prior to pre-wash or pot wash to remove debris. Ensure that staff are trained to use drain plugs in sinks when washing-up/pre-rinsing.

**Measuring & monitoring:** Consider installing water metering on main water supplies to kitchen equipment to measure and report overall usage. Ensure planned preventative maintenance is in place to monitor efficiency and eliminate leaks.

Water is a valuable commodity. It should be treated as such. 



LEE SHEPPARD, DIRECTOR OF CORPORATE AFFAIRS,  
POLICY AND SUSTAINABILITY AT APETITO UK

PROMOTED CONTENT

## SUSTAINABILITY SPOTLIGHT

### CLOSING THE LOOP: THE FUTURE OF PACKAGING SUSTAINABILITY

**Our use of natural resources has grown significantly over recent years with society somewhat assuming there will be a constant supply of raw materials to make the products we consume – which is far from the case.**

For many years waste management efforts have been guided by the three R's, "Reduce, Reuse, Recycle", that promote a fairly simple and linear process to follow when looking at reducing levels of waste and addressing the global warming crisis.

However, more recent thinking has evolved this concept into a broader and more impactful approach of circularity that looks to keep materials in use for as long as possible, maximising the value of resources and benefitting both the environment and economy.

Adopting the notion of the circular economy helps to make larger strides in reducing waste and slowing down our use of natural resources through "closing the loop" and using materials to their highest extent, lowering our need for new raw materials.

Not only does this circularity reduce waste and help preserve materials, but it also helps with reducing emissions. If we need fewer materials, then less are manufactured and imported, ultimately saving a significant amount of carbon, something important when looking at hitting reduction targets.

To support this move to a more circular economy, we should be focusing our efforts on reusing or recycling materials – where they cannot be reduced – and keeping them within a closed loop system that allows the true value, quality and functionality of a material to be maintained. More traditional open loop recycling means that materials are often downgraded into lower-quality products, which limits future potential and often results in waste after one or two cycles.

At apetito, we employed this closed loop approach to our packaging through launching our world-first recycling scheme for meal trays on an industrial scale, which has seen over 1 million trays returned from our NHS customers alone in the past year.

By collecting back our used trays and recycling them into brand-new trays for our meals, we have significantly reduced our use of single-use plastic and reliance on new materials, contributing to the circular economy and leading the way in sustainable packaging solutions.

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FOODS

# KITCHEN AUTOMATION

CATERERS ARE LOOKING TO LIGHT CATERING EQUIPMENT TO IMPROVE EFFICIENCY AND DRIVE FLEXIBILITY IN THE MENU OFFERING, PARTICULARLY WHEN CATERING FOR STAFF AND IN RETAIL AREAS OF THE HOSPITAL ESTATE.



A BANK OF IWAVES FROM RH HALL

**Energy efficiency is one of the key considerations across the kitchen. Professional kitchen equipment should be designed to minimise energy consumption, reducing operational costs and environmental impact. RATIONAL cooking systems incorporate cutting-edge technology, including intelligent sensors and precise temperature control, to cook food with exceptional energy efficiency, reducing electricity consumption by up to 34% and water usage by 53% compared to conventional appliances. The iCombi Pro XS features intelligent cooking applications like the iProductionManager and iCookingSuite that have precise temperature control for energy-efficient performance whilst also improving ease of use.**

User-friendly controls and intuitive interfaces are also essential for efficient operation and minimal training. Both the XS

iVario and XS iCombi Pro offer simple and intuitive controls, making them easy to use for staff of all skill levels.

The precise cooking and portion control brought by the intelligent cooking assistants in these models also help to reduce food waste by ensuring even cooking and preventing overcooking leading to less shrinkage of food.

Another suggestion to reduce energy consumption is a simple switch from conventional stainless steel GN pans to BGL Rieber's new Thermoplates@eco, which, says the company's joint Managing Director, Jon Walker, could save as much as 10% energy and 21% time – meaning ovens could be switched off sooner.

"These pans will pay for themselves hundreds of times over," Jon says. "A 10% energy saving adds up to thousands of pounds over the lifetime of an oven or blast chiller."

### INHERENTLY ENERGY-EFFICIENT

"Saving energy can result in significant cost savings, so it is essential caterers understand the energy efficiency of their kitchens" says Andrew Whyte, Product Manager at Panasonic UK. "Take for example a commercial microwave oven – by its very nature, electricity is converted to microwave energy, which directly penetrates and heats the food;

*"The most obvious benefit to any operator is speed, but a microwave can also offer a great deal of versatility"*





FILTERING OIL WITH THE VITO RANGE FROM VALENTINE

meaning much less energy is wasted in heating the oven itself. It's an efficient process, and increased energy efficiency can lead to significant reductions in overall consumption."

Nick Sanders, Business Development Manager at R H Hall agrees that a microwave is a true kitchen essential, pointing out that the most obvious benefit to any operator is speed, but a microwave can also offer a great deal of versatility. "Operators may look to their microwaves to allow for a diverse menu, without the need for increased manpower, expense or time. As well as traditional regeneration, microwaves can also be used for steaming vegetables and sauces or gravies. For operations looking to introduce a simple food offering, the right microwave can help create a 'kitchen in a box' with a small footprint and a minimal budget. Used properly, the microwave will form a key part of the kitchen operation and bring the ability to serve a full menu."

## TECHNOLOGY & INNOVATION

Experts in supplying light equipment solutions across the UK, the technology in the latest equipment from Jestic

Foodservice Solutions ensures that it can be operated with the minimum of training, offering flexibility across the kitchen team, and allowing chefs to concentrate on creating menus. "Advancing technology across the foodservice sector is about making life easier, not more complex," says Product Director, Michael Eyre.

With the integration of new automation technology in the kitchen, the back of house kitchen process continues to become even more streamlined and accessible. With everything from downloadable and programmable menu controls through to push button simplicity, the latest equipment offers operators total consistency and confidence in performance. The brands supplied by Jestic Foodservice Solutions, such as Antunes, Vitamix and XpressChef, have already incorporated many automated processes into their equipment ensuring effective, efficient usage with minimal staff training.

Jestic Foodservice Solutions has a wide range of options to help caterers to provide hot food with speed and ease at all times. For instance, the toasters, steamers and egg stations from Antunes can help caterers to extend menus. Antunes has also introduced the Wrap and Snack Toaster, which utilises dual-belt technology that grips the product as it moves along the heat source, eliminating transition defects including sticking, slipping and inconsistent marking.

The versatile XpressChef range of accelerated ovens can adapt to a wide range of menu options and fit in almost any



R H HALL'S IWAVE



RATIONAL'S IHEXAGON

*"Advancing technology across the foodservice sector is about making life easier, not more complex"*

location. With their speed, accessibility, versatility and flexibility, the simple on-screen operation of the XpressChef 3i and 4i means that any member of the team can operate the equipment, whilst the ease of menu programming ensures that food will be prepared exactly to the operator's demands, and consistently served in perfect condition to customers.

RATIONAL's new iHexagon model seamlessly integrates steam, hot air and microwave technology, enabling the highest food quality to be achieved quickly and evenly across all racks in the 6-1/1 unit. At the heart of this innovation is the iClimateBoost, an intelligent cooking assistant that precisely adjusts steam, convection and microwave heat to suit each type of food. This allows operators to achieve exceptional food quality in minimal time. The microwave has been paired with RATIONAL's most powerful heating system to-date, restoring a balance of power. Combined with fresh steam, these energy sources are intelligently managed to produce succulent dishes with perfect browning and rich, roasted flavours.

Panasonic has developed a range of solutions designed to support today's operators, such as its new NE-SCV3 high-speed accelerated oven, incorporating a new multi-platform app. The app allows Panasonic to support the demands of all professional kitchens and wifi/LAN access enables updates to be made more securely, centrally and conveniently.



THE RIEBER K-POT WITH GN CONTAINER AND ANTI-SPILL LID

## *“Digitising everything, from electric chafing dishes ... to GN pans, creates a ‘connectivity’ that improves availability of hospital food for staff 24/7”*

Offering microwave (nine power levels), grill (two levels) and convection, the NE-SCV3 features Panasonic’s unique twin inverter technology, to cook food evenly. Use to cook, toast, bake, grill and reheat; for both fresh and frozen foods – from baking-off pastries for breakfast service, to perfectly cooking meat, fish and vegetables.

R H Hall has recently launched iWave® ‘Gen 2’. This updated model is available in both 1000W and 1900W versions, as well as full systems including refrigeration, and is starting to roll out across the UK. In addition to a new larger display, it offers enhanced on screen management for operators and service engineers, as well as multiple language options, with many more benefits and further evolutions planned.

Another light equipment range for the commercial kitchen addresses an entirely different problem – the disposal of used fats, oils and grease, which can be a huge problem. If disposed of incorrectly, operators can be left with significant drainage problems, leading to costly downtime and repair bills. Even when correctly disposed of, there are ongoing challenges and costs to contend with – let

alone the purchase of the new oil. “Many operators are now looking at how light equipment such as oil filtration can help to save costs, reduce waste and ensure their business is as sustainable as possible,” says Steve Elliott, Managing Director of Valentine and CuisinEquip, which distributes the Vito range of portable oil filtration equipment.

Without the need for any additional chemicals, the Vito range helps preserve the optimal taste, colour and texture of fried foods, removing food particles and harmful carbon from the oil. The latest filtration units in the Vito range – including the new portable Vito VM and Vito VL units – now come with VITOconnect, an intelligent cloud-based platform providing commercial kitchens with maximum cost control and seamless reporting for full compliance through the cloud.

The launch of VITOconnect takes monitoring to a new level, with operators able to remotely access information about their Vito usage from a smartphone, tablet or PC, anywhere and at any time. From time-stamped HACCP documentation demonstrating filtration cycles, to the ability to generate custom usage reports for individual sites, VITOconnect drives

functionality and allows operators to stay on top of their oil management.

### **MEETING 24/7 HOT FOOD REQUIREMENTS**

“When considering the best options for users without full catering training, ease of use and safety are key factors,” Nick Sanders advises. Traditional options such as commercial ovens, ranges and combis all use high power and can be daunting. Options that require minimum staff interaction (also a key hygiene consideration) and offer simple operation should be of great interest.

“The iWave® system from Maestrowave operates using microwaves with built in barcode readers that work with uniquely authorised options from a number of leading food companies – simply scan, press and cook! The iWave® system never needs to be programmed and removes the risk of errors in cooking times. This provides access to hot, healthy and nutritional food at the touch of a button. Our leading food partners have plated meal solutions from frozen, fresh and ambient.”

Digitising everything, from electric chafing dishes – such as the Rieber K-Pot – to GN pans, creates a ‘connectivity’ that improves availability of hospital food for staff 24/7, and helps put food closer to where staff work. It saves labour and solves staffing issues (remote control is one option), improving the food service choices for catering managers.

Jon Walker believes the Rieber K-Pot is changing how food is served. Digitisation






PANASONIC'S NE-SCV3 MICROWAVE

ensures precise temperature control, enabling the hands-free reheating of even 'difficult' foods such as rice. Digitised electric chafing dishes can operate under remote control, using just a smartphone, warming food to a set time. Setting up buffets or a hot meal service for staff does not require anyone to serve, or to monitor the food while it is reheating.

Digitisation also boosts hygiene, since electric chafers reheat to precise specs and then hold food hot to the desired temperature. Electric chafing dishes make a buffet multifunctional because they can store multiple reheating or regeneration programmes to use at different times of the day.

Digitising existing GN pans is simple and inexpensive, achieved by attaching digital heatproof labels. For cook-chill and cook-freeze kitchens, this also improves the management of the good-value, nutritionally sound, low-production-cost food available to hospital staff.

"Digitising GN pans, and electric chafing dishes means staff can share a hot meal in an office environment, the canteen or any suitable room with electric power. Digital meal service brings the food closer to staff, gives them more choices and ultimately, could change staff food service in the NHS in the long term," Jon adds.

It is clear that light equipment has a unique role to play for caterers, fulfilling many requirements, not least of which is to save time for staff and simplify tasks. 

[bglrieber.co.uk](http://bglrieber.co.uk)

[jestic.co.uk](http://jestic.co.uk)

[panasonic.co.uk/professionalkitchen](http://panasonic.co.uk/professionalkitchen)

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**DISCOVERY**

**DEN**

# A TRANSLATION SERVICE

DELEGATES AT THE NATIONAL LEADERSHIP FORUM OF THE HEALTH ESTATES & FACILITIES MANAGEMENT ASSOCIATION (HEFMA) IN MAY HEARD FROM FOUR REGISTERED NURSES ABOUT HOW THEIR ROLES AS E&F MATRONS ARE CHANGING THE DYNAMIC FOR THE PROVISION OF SERVICES.

With an estimated 15 E&F Matrons now in position in Trusts across England, this is a small but growing role that is bringing more cohesion to the way clinical and non-clinical staff approach and deliver projects and services. This influence is being felt across many E&F services – from cleaning, infection control and facility design to catering.

During the Forum session, it fell to Claire Gibson, the E&F Matron from Stepping Hill Hospital (Stockport NHS Foundation Trust) to delve into the impact that this role is having on catering services, and how E&F Matrons are truly ‘changing the dynamic’.

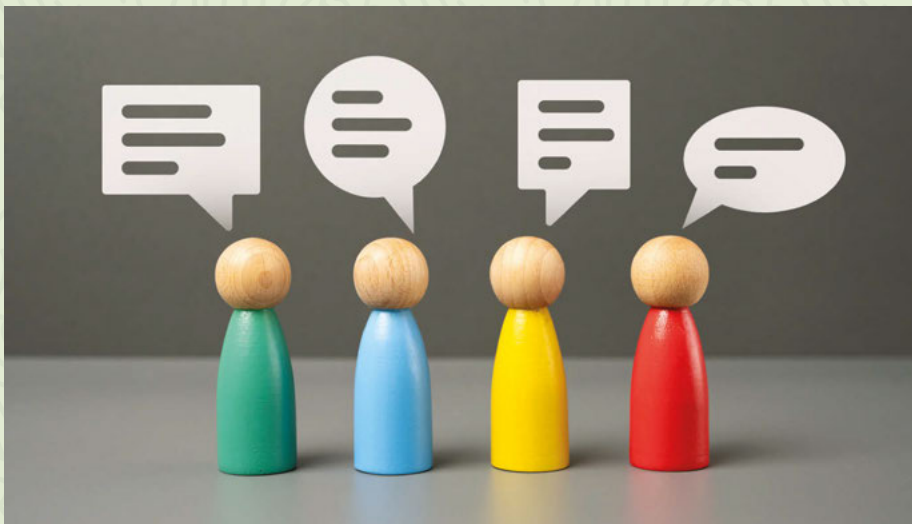
Hilary Clinton defined changing the dynamic as: “to change how people interact and respond to each other.” In essence, that is what the E&F Matron is doing, fostering greater understanding between clinical and non-clinical teams, who ultimately both want the best outcome for the patient. Claire likens her role to that of a translator. Her language, she said, was that of a nurse and she’d had to learn the E&F language, populated as it is by standards, compliance and more acronyms than you can shake a stick at. With a unique

insight into both worlds, the E&F matron can break down the barriers, ‘translate’ between both teams, establish a more open and constructive two-way conversation to make sure the clinical voice is always heard whilst recognising the E&F importance of challenge.

## A VALUABLE ASSET

Claire describes this role as that of a “critical friend” for E&F teams, including caterers. As a registered and experienced senior nurse, the E&F Matron has clinical credibility. On a ward or other clinical area, wearing the appropriate uniform, there is an automatic assumption that the Matron understands the service that nurses and other staff are providing. Their voice is listened to. If that voice is also well-versed in the catering agenda, it brings the unique opportunity to support and empathise, whilst being honest, transparent and recognising that there will always be room for improvement. As part of the team, the E&F Matron helps to identify where a process or service could be done better, and facilitate challenge – internally as a team, and externally too.

*“The E&F Matron helps to identify where a process or service could be done better, and facilitate challenge”*







### CATERING EXAMPLES

One of the original cohort of NHS England Exemplar sites for catering, Stockport was an early adopter of Electronic Patient Meal Ordering. A requirement of the Healthcare Food and Drink Standards published in 2022, for most Trusts electronic meal ordering has the potential to make significant efficiency gains, reduce food waste and provide the patient with a better service. It should lead to more of the patient's meal being eaten, thus improving nutrition and aiding recovery.

"Friend or foe," Claire challenges, admitting it can be both. The team at Stockport wanted to provide patients with a restaurant standard ordering experience, and serve the patient with a meal they will want to eat and enjoy. "It's really important that we put the patient's needs on the plate, to at least give them the best possible chance of enjoying that meal." Electronic meal ordering should help to fulfil these ambitions, but that does not make the introduction of a system any more straightforward.

A big focus for Stockport was to engage with and educate the clinical teams around electronic meal ordering, which involved Claire working with them on the wards to support and understand the problems and challenges that can result in the system not being used in the optimum way. Having provided the engagement and support, it's then important to measure performance – not to be critical, but to recognise areas where staff need more support – and make sure that patients are comfortable and happy. Any compliments about the service are then shared as positive learning.

Another area of focus for Stockport has


*"We've been able to raise the catering voice to the forefront to make sure that their expert contribution is heard"*

been IDDSI meals, which are produced by the cook-fresh in-house team. Identifying an opportunity to enhance and improve this service, a subject matter expert was invited to the hospital to engage with staff and teach chefs how to produce texture-modified meals in such a way that they look appetising, taste amazing and that the preparation process pays attention to reducing food waste. A significant focus of this work has been recognising that changing the texture of food introduces risk, and that risk shouldn't be carried and shared solely by catering teams. Involving clinical colleagues has conveyed this message more widely, and the training and development associated with this initiative is now captured and embedded into a 'one team one risk' mentality. "It has meant that we've spent less and achieved more in terms of the patient experience," Claire says.

The application in practice of the Power of 3 – one of the core principles of the HCA – has also benefited. Stockport is a big advocate of Power of 3 audits whereby the E&F Matron works with the dietitians, caterers and nurses to go into a clinical area and assess all aspects of the patient's meal experience, looking at it through the three different lenses of each professional, with a view to ensuring that the patient is getting the best experience.

Through the Power of 3 audits, they've recognised that the meal service is often

the highlight of a patient's day, and it needs to be recognised as such. However, this often fails when clinical teams view meal service as a task. "Through doing the audits we've been able to identify the barriers and the challenges, and then where we need to introduce change and support," Claire explains. "We've been able to challenge the status quo – the 'we've always done it this way' protest, and we found that a lot of our catering staff had the knowledge and the concerns but maybe they didn't really have the voice. I feel that our Power of 3 audit has given them a voice. Where they might have been silenced before, or their opinions might not have been listened to, we've been able to raise the catering voice to the forefront to make sure that their expert contribution is heard. It's ensured that our patient meal services are patient-centred, that we remain flexible and responsive to what patients need, whilst recognising that we are always evolving and learning."

By spanning the different teams and disciplines, the E&F Matron is encouraging and facilitating collaboration. "Coming together brings recognition that we can only do this as a team," Claire concluded. "We have to collectively recognise each of the skills that we can bring and then support our teams to make improvements with patient safety and wellbeing at the heart of everything." 

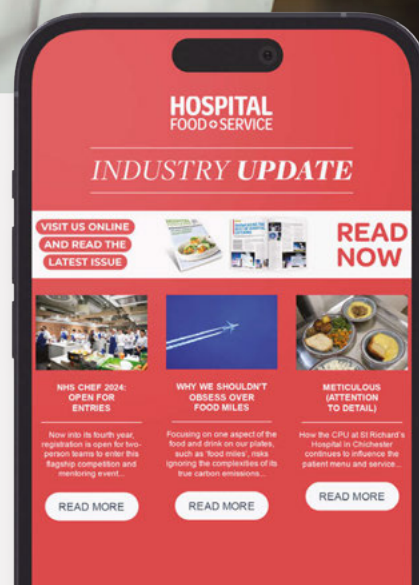
# HOSPITAL FOOD + SERVICE

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## NEW PRODUCTS

### COOL FOR CANS

Williams Refrigeration has launched new shelves for its refrigerated grab-and-go Multidecks that are specially designed to hold canned drinks. As well as displaying cans more effectively than a standard shelf, they make it easier for consumers to access them and for staff to restock the unit, enhancing both customer satisfaction and work efficiency.

The can holder shelves look very smart and are gently sloped to allow cans to slide forward seamlessly to fill up the gap when one is taken. Shelves are available for all sizes and options of Multideck, they are easy to install and can be retrofitted to existing units. Their adjustable brackets mean they can work with different sized cans and can be adapted if the offering changes.

The individual can shelves have list prices from £467.

[williams-refrigeration.co.uk](http://williams-refrigeration.co.uk)



### A PHAT PASTY CHRISTMAS UNVEILED

The Phat Pasty Company, one of the leading UK foodservice suppliers of pies, pasties and savoury treats, has revealed its festive range for 2024, offering something for all operators – from grab & go hot pasties, to centre plate pies and savoury bake snacks.

Brand new for this year is the introduction of the Wild Boar, Apple and Cider Gluten-Free Pie. Made with wild boar and apple, in a creamy cider and mustard sauce, topped with a golden gluten-free pastry, the pie was overall runner up and Silver Award Winner in the Free From category at the British Pie Awards 2024.

Available in two size formats, 300g centre plate or 90g mini pie, these pies are perfect on winter menus as either a hearty main, a starter or on sharing boards and platters.

The new pie joins a line-up of three hot-to-go yuletide treats including, for meat lovers, the Phat Christmas Dinner Pasty, filled with turkey, bacon, sausage and cranberries, seasoned with sage and onion and encased in a hand-crimped pasty, and the Phat Festive Chunky Sausage Roll, with pork, turkey, ham & cranberries, wrapped in a puff pastry roll.

The range also offers a meat-free option; the Phat Festive Vegan Bake. This puff pastry slice is filled with mushrooms, cranberries and pea protein chunks in a creamy coconut milk sauce, seasoned with sage & thyme.

[phatpasty.com](http://phatpasty.com)

### FEA'S FOODSERVICE CARBON PROFESSIONAL WAREWASHING MODULE GOES LIVE

The Foodservice Equipment Association (FEA) has launched its latest Foodservice Carbon Professional (FCP) module; Warewashing.

Focusing on catering equipment, FCP is designed to help foodservice professionals get a full understanding of carbon net zero, sustainability and energy efficiency, so they can use the knowledge to help meet green targets.

FCP comprises a Core Module that looks at the broad picture, plus additional sector-specific modules covering dedicated areas. It is aimed at anyone working in the foodservice industry.

FCP is delivered via FEA Academy, the Association's learning management system. It consists of online modules that are completed within 12 months, at the student's own pace, and webinar tutorials.

[fea.org.uk](http://fea.org.uk)



### MICROSAVE INTRODUCES NEW TEFLON ACCESSORIES

Microsave has announced the launch of MicroMats, Teflon Base Liners and a new size of its Teflon cooking trays.

MicroMats are tailored specifically for Panasonic SCV2, SCV3 (MIB-SCV) 385 x 326 models, and NE-C1275 (MIB-1275) 427 x 318 commercial microwaves to protect the interior of the oven from the spillage of juices from meats and pies that can seep into the ceramic base and cause irreparable damage over time.

This damage not only compromises hygiene standards but also leads to operational disruptions and costly repairs. Microsave's MicroMats, priced at £16.99, offer a cost-effective solution by protecting the oven floor from such spills.

Microsave's new 280mm x 180mm x 25mm trays are reinforced with a medical-grade stainless steel rim wrapped in a Teflon cover for added safety and hygiene, and are available in four colours to prevent cross-contamination. They enhance cooking flexibility and efficiency, catering specifically to the needs of professional kitchens.

Crafted with high-grade materials and precision engineering, these trays allow chefs to optimise oven space by accommodating multiple trays simultaneously. This unique feature not only boosts operational efficiency but also enhances cooking performance, ensuring consistent results with every use.

[regale.co.uk](http://regale.co.uk)



## NEW PRODUCTS



### 'WE LOVE CAKE' LAUNCHES FIRST BREAKFAST OFFERING

Bells of Lazonby's 'We Love Cake' has launched its first free-from Breakfast Muffin. Available now in frozen wholesale, the new breakfast offering is gluten, wheat and milk free, while maintaining the iconic taste of a wholesome morning muffin.

The new hand-finished breakfast muffins are the taste of breakfast, packed with raisins, apricot, cranberries, gluten-free oats and pumpkin seeds with a cinnamon finish.

Individually wrapped and distributed exclusively by Central Foods, the new lines are a perfect and tasty alternative for consumers looking to avoid gluten, wheat and milk, from a lifestyle or dietary choice.

Made on the edge of the Lake District by renowned family bakers since 1946, the muffins are baked in small batches by skilled bakers.

[we-love-cake.co.uk](http://we-love-cake.co.uk)

### LOCKHART CATERING EQUIPMENT LAUNCHES NEW HELIGAN TABLEWARE COLLECTION

Lockhart Catering Equipment has expanded its exclusive Artisan tableware portfolio to include a new collection, named Heligan.

Combining the look of handcrafted pottery with the durability and strength required for the fast-paced foodservice industry, the new pieces are made with genuine vitrified stoneware. Featuring a distinctive meadow green glaze, with reactive highlights of lilac and turquoise, the Heligan collection brings nature to the table.

Available in an assortment of different sized plates and bowls – including a mix of traditional bowls, and wider, shallower tableware inline with latest styles – the range also includes cups, saucers, jugs and teapots.

[lockhart.co.uk/Artisan](http://lockhart.co.uk/Artisan)



### PANASONIC SPEEDS UP SERVICE WITH NEW NE-SCV3

Panasonic UK has launched its new NE-SCV3 high-speed accelerated oven – the latest product innovation to join its hugely successful Professional Kitchen portfolio. Incorporating a new multi-platform app, the cutting-edge NE-SCV3 puts innovation at your fingertips, with ease of use ease first and foremost.

Offering microwave (nine power levels), grill (two levels) and convection; the new NE-SCV3 features Panasonic's unique twin inverter technology to cook food evenly. Its ventless design with a built-in catalytic converter and a full metal door ensures an even distribution of heat, while an easy-to-clean cavity keeps maintenance simple and reduces the necessary cleaning time. Use to cook, toast, bake, grill and reheat; for both fresh and frozen foods – from baking-off delicious pastries for the breakfast period, to perfectly cooking meat, fish and vegetables.

[panasonic.co.uk/professionalkitchen](http://panasonic.co.uk/professionalkitchen)



### APETITO LAUNCHES 'BETTER THAN EVER' PURÉE MEALS

Healthcare meals provider, apetito has unveiled a new and improved range of world-leading Purée meals, designed to bring dignity back to mealtimes for those living with dysphagia. Following customer feedback, apetito has made changes to its texture-modified meals, and introduced five new dishes.

New to the menu are an aromatic Purée Chicken Korma and warming Purée Bean Chilli, alongside three potato-topped pies, Purée Cottage Pie, Purée Shepherd's Pie and Purée Fish Pie, that feature a "just cooked" browning effect to enhance the visual appeal.

All apetito's Puréed dishes have been brought into the smaller 'Purée Petite' portion size, providing a more manageable serving. This ensures that even those with smaller appetites can still enjoy meals packed with essential calories and protein.

The allergen profile of meals has also been improved, with 11 dishes now being made without all 14 recognised allergens and many more made without milk and soya.

To elevate the flavours of its recipes, apetito has added a wide selection of new puréed sauces and gravies into many of the meals, along with an array of new side dishes that expand on the variety and choice available.

Most of the new and improved meals are compatible with the iWave, increasing the number of products that can be prepared using multiple regeneration methods and supporting on ease of preparation.

[apetito.co.uk/our-service/hospital-meal-services](http://apetito.co.uk/our-service/hospital-meal-services)



## CENTRAL FOODS EXTENDS GLUTEN FREE RANGE

Frozen food distributor Central Foods has introduced two new gluten free products for the foodservice sector.

The KaterVeg! vegan and gluten free VG sausage is made to the same recipe as the popular KaterVeg! vegan meatballs. Using soya, the sausage is a source of protein and is high in fibre and low in sugar.

The Golden Valley Foods breaded chicken schnitzel is made with 100% pure breast meat, coated in gluten-free bread crumbs. Perfect to serve plated with veg, salad or fries, or in a bun as a fast food option, the schnitzel has an artisan, handmade look.

The new product joins a number of gluten free options now included in the Golden Valley Foods poultry range, such as chicken goujons and chunks.

[centralfoods.co.uk](http://centralfoods.co.uk)



## BONCULINA UK PUTS SUSTAINABLY SOURCED WILD VENISON ON HOSPITAL MENUS

BonCulina UK has announced the addition of two indulgent wild venison dishes – Venison Cobbler and Venison Stew – into its BonCulina Plated and BonCulina Multi-portion ranges for the healthcare sector, available chilled and frozen. Both recipes were specially developed by Thomas Hempstead, BonCulina's Michelin-trained chef, ensuring an unparalleled culinary experience.

Despite some stigma existing around venison, BonCulina stresses it is important to understand that deer have no natural predators, and therefore pose a risk in the UK due to their rapidly growing population and the damage they cause to agriculture and woodlands. Including venison in the healthcare range not only provides a nutritious and delicious option for hospital patients, staff and visitors, it also helps to balance the ecosystem and manage the deer population effectively and sustainably.

Tim Radcliffe, Net Zero Food Programme Manager at NHS England comments: "Wild venison ticks all the boxes of the NHS goals from sustainability to health, and means we can give patients and staff meals which are full of nutrients to aid recovery and promote good health. Using 100% wild, lead-free venison from well-managed forests makes it an incredibly sustainable meat to eat. It's great to see the nation's forests feeding the nation's plates."

[bonculina.com/en/](http://bonculina.com/en/)

## FLEXSPEED: HIGH VOLUME DISHWASHER TECHNOLOGY THAT ADAPTS TO STAFF CAPACITY

Winterhalter has introduced Flexspeed technology for its MT flight and rack conveyor systems, which adapts to how staff are operating and keeps the machine working as efficiently and cost effectively as possible.

Issues can occur with large scale conveyor dishwasher systems if loading slows down, for instance, or if staff aren't keeping up with unloading, negatively impacting the efficiency of the operation and wasting both energy and money.

In the loading zone, the Flexspeed front mode detects gaps between racks or, in the case of a flight type system, empty spots on the conveyor, and gradually reduces the conveyor belt speed until the gaps are gone. This means the machine is fully utilised, with no loss of capacity. Smaller gaps optimise performance, thus reducing costs, and give better rinse and drying results. They also lead to less waiting time in the removal area.

In the unloading zone, the Flexspeed end mode detects frequent triggering of the limit switch, gradually reducing transport speed until it detects continuous operation again. It's cost effective, as it ensures the machine is continuously running, with no reduction in capacity, and it means less wear and tear as it avoids the issue of stop-start operation.

Flexspeed is standard on all Winterhalter's new MT rack and flight dishwasher systems.

[winterhalter.com/uk-en/](http://winterhalter.com/uk-en/)





NHS SUPPLY CHAIN

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Linking the dairy chain

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**NHS****NHS SUPPLY CHAIN**

# FOUR FANTASTIC YEARS OF NHS SUPPLY CHAIN: FOOD CHEF'S ACADEMY...

## THIS OCTOBER MARKS THE FOUR-YEAR ANNIVERSARY OF CHEF'S ACADEMY!

**D**eveloped in October 2020, after identifying a gap in training and resource for NHS Chefs, our Culinary Ambassador, Nick Vadis and his team have since provided exceptional training courses across the UK full of culinary creativity, inspiration and more.

Over the last four years, the Chef's Academy team have not only motivated hundreds of NHS chefs through immersive training, sharing new, innovative recipes based on our Culinary Concepts, but have also helped raise the profile of NHS chefs, offering continuous development, career progression, networking and more.

Our Culinary and Dietetics team would like to thank each and every one of you who have been a part of the Chef's Academy's success over the last four years. To celebrate, NHS Supply Chain: Food will be hosting a birthday podcast with hosts Nick Vadis and Idrees Anwar and two very special NHS chef guests. Keep an eye on NHS Supply Chain's website and social media to tune in. Happy listening!

### INTRODUCING OUR BRAND-NEW TRAINING INITIATIVE, THE SKILLS ACADEMY...

Our Culinary and Dietetics team are excited to announce the official launch of Skills Academy, a brand-new training experience aimed at raising the profile of NHS general catering assistants, providing them with new skillsets for both personal and professional development within the NHS.

Earlier this year, the team piloted the brand-new training experience at Lainston House and Leicester Glenfield Hospital, as well as hosting two summer sessions at Edgbaston Cricket Ground that scored a perfect 10/10 from attendees and received remarkable feedback from general catering managers.

Hear what Daniel Hoggett, General Catering Manager from The Robert Jones and Agnes Hunt Orthopaedic Hospital NHS Foundation Trust, had to say about the most recent events: "What a positive return to work I had following the recent Skills Academies. A lot of positives and exciting conversations happening amongst the staff and a lot of other members of staff eager to join the next events in our area. I think it really brought home to them that they are the key to making positive change in a hospital setting, whether it's patient feeding, all the way through to retail where we are providing food for our visitors and staff. What's even better is they are going to be using some of the concepts and skills learnt from both days to provide food for our patients in the gardens for one of our hospital charity events."

To find out more about the Skills Academy, head over to the NHS Supply Chain: Food website: [supplychain.nhs.uk/event/skills-academy/](https://supplychain.nhs.uk/event/skills-academy/)

### SQUASHING FOOD WASTE THIS HALLOWEEN...

With Halloween around the corner, remember that pumpkins aren't just for Halloween! Why not try using all parts of the pumpkin, from seeds to skin, to create a range of delicious, heart-warming and nourishing recipes from pumpkin soup to delicious pumpkin-flavoured sweet treats that deliver on taste all whilst making a positive impact on the environment!







# THE LAST WORD

NICOLA STRAWTHER IS CHIEF DIETETIC AND CATERING TECHNICIAN AT NOTTINGHAM UNIVERSITY HOSPITALS NHS TRUST, AND NATIONAL VICE CHAIR OF THE HOSPITAL CATERERS ASSOCIATION. AFTER GRADUATING FROM CATERING COLLEGE AND WORKING IN VARIOUS CHEF ROLES, NICOLA BEGAN HER CAREER IN THE NHS AS A DIET CHEF IN 1999 AT KING'S MILL HOSPITAL. OVER THE NEXT 10 YEARS SHE GAINED VALUABLE EXPERIENCE IN ROLES WITHIN CATERING AND DIETETICS AND MOVED INTO HER CURRENT ROLE IN 2009. SHE IS A KEY MEMBER OF THE CATERING TEAM, DEVELOPING AND IMPLEMENTING THE NUH MEMORY MENU AND EMBEDDING THE HCA'S CAMPAIGNS, POWER OF 3 AND LAST 9 YARDS AS CORE ELEMENTS OF THE TRUST'S NUTRITION STRATEGY.



## ACHIEVEMENT

For me, it's the resilience of people in the team and how hard they work. The projects I've been involved with have been a success because of the team and how everyone works together. Things can be difficult – operational pressures, staff shortages and so on – but we always manage to get on and interact. I engage with clinical staff as well, and people don't always understand what our catering team do. Sometimes the chefs themselves don't realise how important their role is. As caterers we are supporting patient recovery, and we should all be proud of that.

## DEVELOPMENT

I led on electronic patient meal ordering for the Expert Panel for NHS England following the Independent Review. I'm personally invested in this, and keen to see it adopted across the NHS. It's also pleasing to see some Trusts now linking this with their electronic patient register. They are in the minority still but this has to be the way to go, because it introduces another layer of cross-checking to ensure the patient is being served a meal that is suitable for their dietary needs. It's a big step in the right direction for patient safety. Hats off to those who have achieved it, and their suppliers.

## CHANGE

Our retail services are sub contracted, and ideally I would like to have them back in house. Our partner does a fantastic job but I think we could match it. Developing the team is another a priority for me, so we are future-proofing our service. I think we could do more, if we had the resources. I would like to give individuals professional leave to attend events, for instance, but backfilling their shifts is

difficult. I would also like to have more chefs visiting the wards – even if it's just to deliver a basket of fruit or cakes in the afternoon – so they can talk to the patients. This would be so impactful for both chefs and patients.

## MOTIVATION

My house is chaotic in the morning. I have two children of my own and two step-children. Chaos aside, seeing them all grow and change, how they interact with each other is a privilege. Fortunately, my partner Paul is really supportive. My complete switch off is swimming. I've been addicted since childhood and do 80 lengths on average three times a week. It really helps with my mental health. In fact, when I was having treatment and couldn't swim, the negative impact of this was almost as bad as the treatment itself. It was an experience that made me view things differently.

## SUPPORT

The national team at NHSE have done a tremendous amount of work and I know a lot is happening behind the scenes. The recipe bank is really positive and I appreciate how much work it takes to bring a project like to fruition. I think they should build on that, and anything they can do to reduce the amount of repetitiveness in the system would be great. We're all trying to write the same strategies and other documents, and whilst there will always be some personalisation needed, more templates and resources would be helpful. I know they've done some, and it takes time, so please carry on. We also need to support each other, and by that I mean Trust-to-Trust, within the HCA and suppliers. There shouldn't be barriers. So let's just be kind to each other and work together, stronger and smarter. 🙌

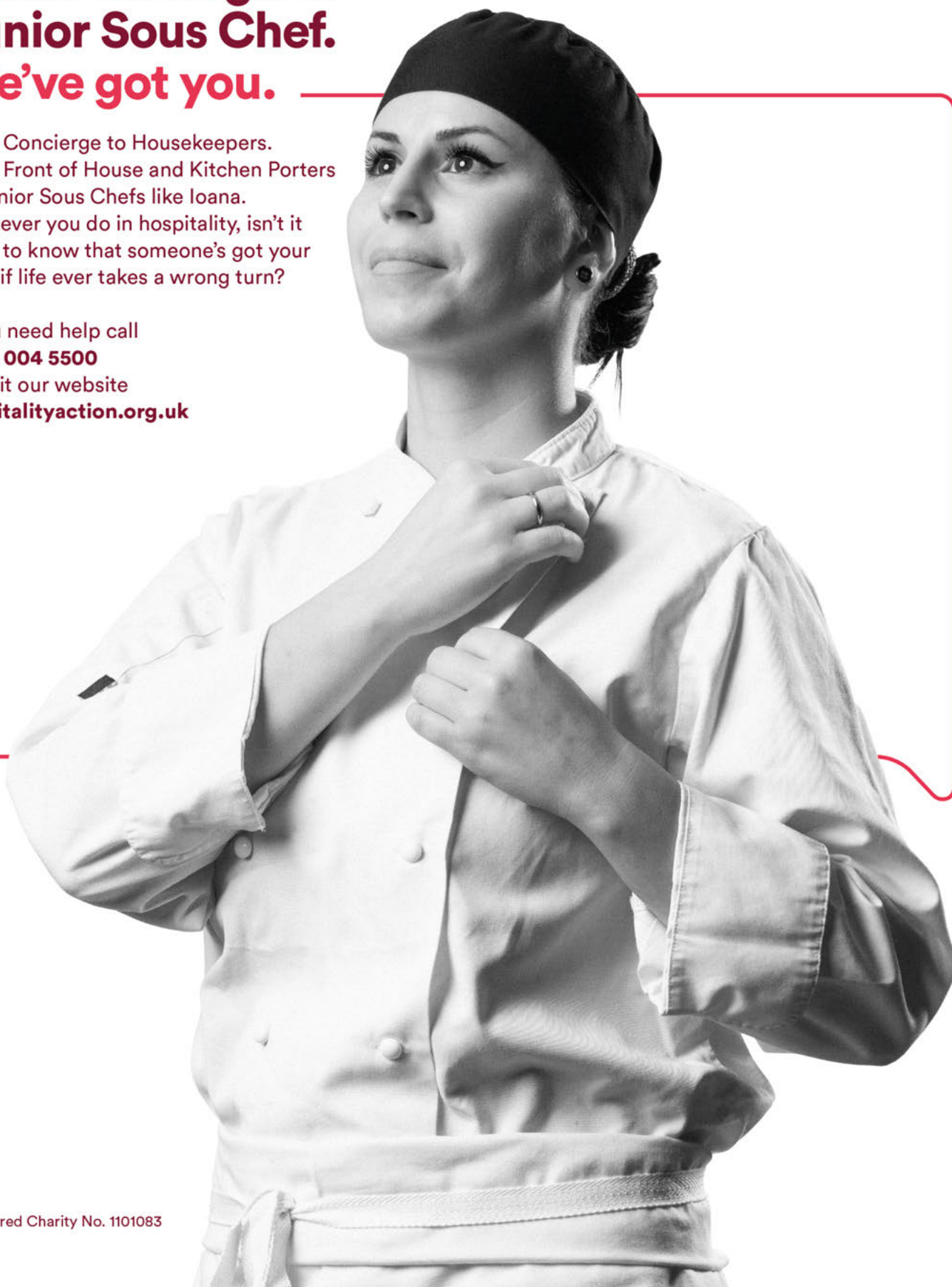


NICOLA (CENTRE) WITH THE TRUST'S FOOD PRODUCTION MANAGER SUE AUSTIN (LEFT) AND FOOD SERVICES MANAGER MARIE GURLING COLLECTING AN AWARD FOR THE TEAM

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# MEET THE NORTHERN IRELAND BRANCH

HOSPITAL CATERER CATCHES UP WITH **THE NORTHERN IRELAND BRANCH** IN THIS LATEST IN OUR SERIES OF BRANCH PROFILES.



BRANCH MEMBERS TRAVELLING TO AVIEMORE FOR THE 2024 FORUM

**A**ctive and participative sums up the Northern Ireland Branch in a nutshell – both locally and nationally. There might be a stretch of water separating Northern Ireland from the other nations of the UK, but to members of the HCA Branch, this is not a barrier to engaging with events that are taking place on the national stage.

In the last 12 months:

- Nine members of the Branch travelled to Aviemore in April for the 2024 National Leadership & Development Forum
- Branch member, Clodagh Hastings won the HCA's 2024 Rising Star Award
- Branch member, Gill Murphy addressed the national Forum to explain the impact of the Safety Pause – an initiative to reduce risk in the patient meal service which won the HCA Efficiency & Improvement Award in 2023
- Two teams from Northern Ireland took part in the 2024 HCA 4 Nations Challenge, with a strong travelling contingent of supporters; Darren Taggart and Angela Dickson from Causeway Hospital were award the coveted Best-in-Class
- The well-supported 2024 annual study day was held in September, with a theme of 'Let's Champion Food' [see separate report on this event in the Branch News, p5]

- At the 2023 annual study day, the Branch welcomed the HCA Executive Team for their first face-to-face meeting since the end of the pandemic.

## STRONG EVENT PROGRAMME

The Northern Ireland Branch also has an action-packed programme of visits and social occasions throughout the year, from informative and inspiring visits to farms, producers and suppliers, to educational talks and participation at relevant exhibitions to promote the HCA and membership of the Northern Ireland Branch. "If you are working within hospital catering and would like to benefit from the networking and knowledge sharing opportunities within our Branch, please do get in touch. You will be sure of a very warm welcome," says Branch Chair, Karen McLaughlin.



BRANCH MEMBERS ON A VISIT TO GLENARM CASTLE

## MEET OUR BRANCH OFFICERS

We asked the Chair, Secretary and Treasurer to tell us a bit about themselves.



### CHAIR:

**KAREN MCLAUGHLIN**  
General Manager for  
Catering and Domestic

Services (Northern Sector) in the Northern Trust. Over the course of 35 years, Karen has worked her way up through the ranks from assistant cook to her present position, which she has held for around five years.

I am an avid runner. I also cycle and swim, but running is my real passion. For a number of years I was the captain of my local running club, but now I just do it for fun. I have run races from 5k upwards, and have completed 13 marathons. My PB is 3hrs 17 mins.



### SECRETARY:

**KARINA WATTERSON**  
Interim Assistant Domestic/Catering Manager for the Northern Health Trust, managing the Southern Sector – Whiteabbey and Moyle Hospitals. Karina has worked for the Trust for over 15 years, joining as a clerical officer, and is grateful for the dedication and commitment of every member of her "amazing" workforce.

Family is very important to me, which is why I enjoy spending as much time with them as possible – from our annual family skiing holidays to Mont Blanc, to other outdoor sports including water skiing and wakeboarding.



### TREASURER:

**SHIRLEY ALLISON**  
Community Domestic Services Manager (Northern Sector) for the Northern Trust. Shirley has worked for the Trust for 32 years, starting as a cook. Her job varies from day to day – covering a large geographical area – and is made so much easier by a "fabulous" team.

I was a keen skier and skied in the championships in Canada and Bavaria a number of years ago, however I had to give it up due to injury.



accredited by

**coeliacuk**  
live well gluten free

Some of these were relatively simple logistical measures. For instance, food storage areas were reorganised and adjusted to separate gluten free meals from other ingredients.

Others were more complex, such as reviewing and updating the food safety policy, which had to be approved by the Board and then rolled out, as well as introducing policies and procedures to be followed in the CPU and on the wards. The food safety management system was reviewed and extended to raise awareness of gluten free. Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) were written and added for handling food for coeliac patients, allergen patients and those with multiple dietary requirements, such as gluten free and IDDSI, or Halal, for instance.

Specific coeliac training was introduced for all catering staff, to different levels depending on the seniority and responsibility of the role. A podcast was developed as a mandatory training element for catering teams and nutritional excellence leads to embed gluten free awareness, and refresher training added. The training was developed in-house by Nicola Strawther, the Trust's Chief Dietetic and Catering Technician, with support from the Estates & Facilities Training team.

One area where a suitable compromise solution had to be found was in the actual cooking of the gluten free meals. Coeliac UK had wanted them to be cooked in a separate part of the oven, but this was not possible. Instead, it was agreed that the gluten free meals would be sealed for cooking and then served before any other meals on the ward. Specific training was included around this new process.

After several stages of feedback and review, when Coeliac UK was satisfied that everything had been addressed, an independent person was sent to site to carry out a final review and confirm that all processes and procedures were being followed. This included observation of food delivery to patients, sandwich production, and the inspection of documentary evidence for the food safety management system and training for staff.

Sue found the Coeliac UK team to be very supportive throughout this process – suggesting solutions and offering encouragement. They would always explain why certain measures were necessary, which helps in turn when introducing changes to working procedures for staff.

Having a food safety lead at NUH –

Mark Fulford – was also key to gaining the accreditation. Mark supported the team with the SOPs and food safety elements, updating policies and procedures for all staff.

From start of the process to final accreditation took around 18 months. It was complex and time-consuming, led by Sue and Nicola with no additional resource. However, the benefits in terms of the reduction of risk to the patient, and the confidence it brings to them that the food they will be served whilst in hospital is safe for them to eat, makes it worthwhile. Accreditation supports NUH in retaining its five-star Environmental Health food safety rating, and gives assurance to patients and their friends and families that the Trust takes food safety seriously.

"It was worth it, but it is not to be under-estimated," says Sue. "With hindsight, I think you need a dedicated team, or at least an additional person, with the time to drive it. It's an achievement I'm proud of, especially considering we have a mass production unit. It's not an easy accreditation for any large catering establishment to achieve."

\* Joining Aberdeen Royal Infirmary (NHS Grampian)





# SAFE TO EAT

**THE CITY HOSPITAL AND QUEENS MEDICAL CENTRE IN NOTTINGHAM HAVE BECOME THE FIRST NHS HOSPITALS IN ENGLAND\* TO ACHIEVE COELIAC UK'S GLUTEN FREE ACCREDITATION. SUE AUSTIN, FOOD PRODUCTION MANAGER AT NOTTINGHAM UNIVERSITY HOSPITALS NHS TRUST (NUH), TALKS TO HOSPITAL CATERER ABOUT WHAT WAS INVOLVED.**

**N**UH is a large acute Trust, with two main sites, 1,800 beds and a Central Production Unit (CPU) running a cook-freeze service and producing in the region of 7,000 hot meals every day.

Coeliac UK supports people living with coeliac disease, and its gluten free accreditation and GF Trademark provides assurance to sufferers that the site – be it a restaurant, school, café, public house or a hospital – is safe for them to eat at.

The CPU at NUH is not an allergen-free site, and because it cannot guarantee there is no cross contamination within the unit, pre-prepared allergen-free meals which are also suitable for gluten free diets are

bought-in. Fresh gluten free sandwiches and some snack items, however, are made on site to request in a separate dietary bay. In spite of this, achieving the GF Trademark was not a simple task.

Gluten free accreditation is a very comprehensive award, which doesn't just apply to the food itself, but to all aspects and processes involved in food handling, including storage, transporting, cooking and serving those meals. This meant a significant amount of work in staff training – of the 400 or so catering staff across the two sites as well as ward staff who do not sit within the catering team. It also required a review of the food safety management process. Before even tackling such a

large piece of work, Board-level approval was needed, so the rationale for doing it had to be articulated and fed up through the different workstreams. "

## THE PROCESS

Following an initial conversation with the team at Coeliac UK, NUH was supplied with a large checklist to work through, which included outlining existing processes and compiling documentation, such as the food safety policy. This was followed by a detailed audit of both sites – the audit at City Hospital took an entire day, and half a day at Queens Medical Centre. As a result of the audit and the paperwork provided, a list of required changes was produced.

It's very early days yet for the science, but experts believe that a healthy gut is the principal foundation for good health. The gut refers to everything in the body that is involved with processing and digesting food. That might be its function, but there is growing awareness that the gut is linked to every system and organ in the body, influencing our physical and mental health. Furthermore, 70% of the immune system is in the gut; the body's immune cells learn from the microbes. Any breakdown in this communication causes problems, for instance, if the immune system fails to attack the virus the outcome is a more severe illness.

The gut and the brain are also linked, via the vagus nerve. Sometimes described as the body's 'superhighway' the vagus nerve carries two-way signals between the brain, internal organs and the digestive system.

However, as many as 25% of Brits suffer with a gut problem. So what can be done to influence those microbes for the better?

## DIET

There are factors that we can't influence – such as age, genetics and medication we may be taking – but of those we can, diet is the most significant, followed by

exercise and stress. The gut microbiome is like an ecosystem, and it's very personal to the individual. Whilst there is no 'one-size-fits-all' prescription to achieving good gut health, there are some general steps that are agreed on. Top of that list of tangible tips is the need to eat more fibre.

Fibre is the part of the plant that our bodies can't digest, but our gut microbiome love it. However, most people – nine out of ten – are not eating enough of it. The NHS recommends we should eat 30g of fibre a day, but that's actually quite difficult to do. Consider, for instance, that a portion of broccoli is just 2.5g, 160g of brown rice 2.4g and a slice of rye bread is 3.6g and you start to get an idea of just how difficult it is to get to 30g every day. There are some simple steps to boost fibre consumption, such as swapping white pasta, rice or bread for wholegrain and keeping the skin on vegetables.

Variety is also important. Consider for instance if a patient is on antibiotics, which kill some of the good bacteria as well as the bad, and it's easy to understand that the more variety the better. The recommendation here is for 30 different plants every week. This might sound overwhelming, but it's not as difficult as it sounds. Included in that

total of 30 different plants would be different colour varieties – for instance, red, yellow and green peppers – as well as the full spectrum of vegetables, fruit, wholegrains, legumes, nuts, seeds, herbs and spices. Go for a mixture – for example, a variety of salad leaves, mixed berries, mixed nuts and a mixture of beans, to increase diversity even further.

Fermented foods and probiotics are described by Alana as the "icing" and "cherry" on top of the "gut cake." Humans have been consuming fermented foods for more than 14,000 years. Fermented foods containing live dietary microbes modulate the gut microbiota and enhance nutritive value. However, not all fermented foods contain live microbes – alcohol, for instance, being the obvious example. Think yoghurt, kefir, some cheeses and miso to name just a few.

Finally, a holistic approach, combining a beneficial diet with adequate sleep, hydration, good stress management and exercise will have the most impact on gut health.

The science is complicated, and it's in its early days still, but understanding is growing rapidly, and ensuring healthcare professionals have the knowledge they need about gut health is now a priority.

## THE POWER OF SMALL

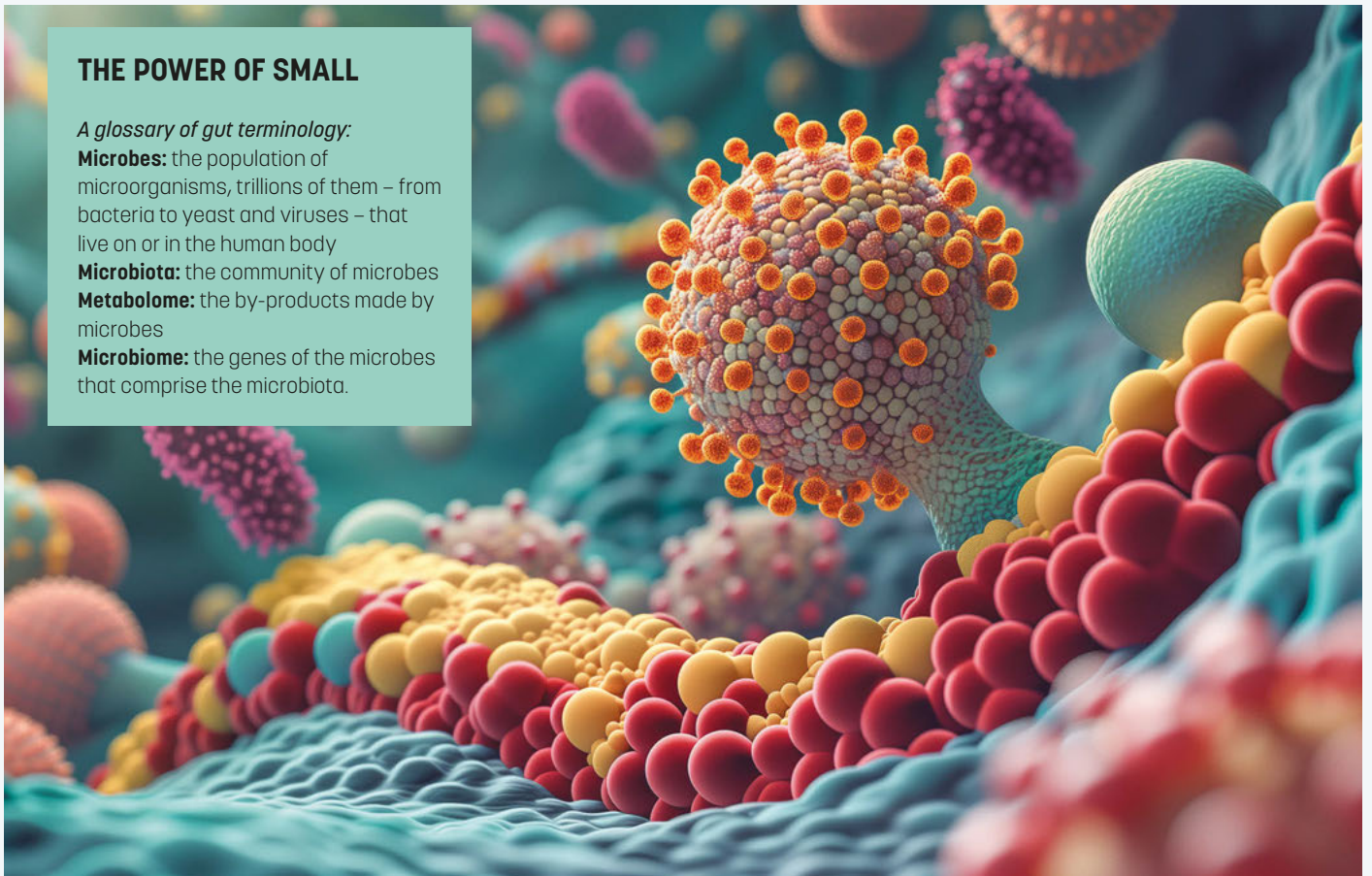
### *A glossary of gut terminology:*

**Microbes:** the population of microorganisms, trillions of them – from bacteria to yeast and viruses – that live on or in the human body

**Microbiota:** the community of microbes

**Metabolome:** the by-products made by microbes

**Microbiome:** the genes of the microbes that comprise the microbiota.







# HOW HEALTHY IS YOUR GUT?

CHEFS AND HOSPITAL CATERERS ATTENDING THE RECENT HEALTHCARE CATERING LIVE CONFERENCE HEARD FROM ALANA MACFARLANE, CO-FOUNDER OF THE GUT STUFF, AND YAKULT'S DR EMILY PRPA, ABOUT THE IMPORTANCE OF GUT HEALTH, AND WHY IT WILL FORM THE CORNERSTONE OF MODERN MEDICINE.



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# GET INVOLVED – MEALS ON WHEELS NEEDS OUR SUPPORT

**MEALS ON WHEELS WEEK RETURNS FROM NOVEMBER 4-8, 2024. ORGANISED BY THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF CARE CATERING (NACC) THE WEEK RAISES AWARENESS OF AND CELEBRATES MEALS ON WHEELS SERVICES ACROSS THE COUNTRY, AND THE VITAL ROLE THEY PLAY IN SUPPORTING OLDER AND VULNERABLE PEOPLE LIVING IN OUR COMMUNITIES.**

**A** number of our member hospitals already provide Meals on Wheels services and see it as an income generator. As the services provided by local authorities contract, this could be an area where your hospital could help the wider local community.

Each day throughout the week there are activities planned to highlight some of the particular elements of Meals on Wheels.

## MONDAY, NOVEMBER 4 MULTI-CULTURAL MONDAY

The UK has a multi-cultural demographic for older and vulnerable people requiring the service. Multi-Cultural Monday is about recognising the diversity of the Meals on Wheels service, and how it connects and offers meals to cater for all.



## TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 5 THANK YOU TUESDAY

Show your appreciation for everyone that contributes to Meals on Wheels services – whether that's the team members making the meals, volunteers, drivers, carers, or those that work behind the scenes – today is the day to show our gratitude.

## WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 6 VIP ON WHEELS

VIP on Wheels is a fantastic opportunity to invite local MPs, VIPs and dignitaries to experience service delivery and celebrate your service and the immense value it adds to the lives of those receiving it. You could also use the day to highlight the services you provide in your own main unit.



## THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 7 CONNECT THURSDAY

Not all vulnerable and older people have the luxury of leaving their homes, due to a host of reasons. Meals on Wheels is more than just a meal, and offers these individuals connection with people, an opportunity for wellbeing checks and in some cases a smile and chat in person with another human. Join the NACC in sharing your examples of how you connect with your service users.



## FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 8 FRIDAY FRIENDS

Highlight the importance of social eating and how it helps reduce loneliness and social isolation. Friday Friends will bring people in our communities together to share the joy of food and time. Why not invite the local community into one of your retail units?

The week is also an ideal opportunity to spotlight the social contribution of Meals on Wheels services. Loneliness and social isolation are prevalent in our communities, and Meals on Wheels, together with lunch clubs and day centres, play a critical role in reducing this.

Since the NACC started this campaign over 30 years ago, Meals on Wheels Week remains relevant. The NACC is asking the public to support local meal services that help address loneliness, social isolation and safety in the community for older and vulnerable people."

To find out more please visit:  
**[thenacc.co.uk/events/meals-on-wheels-week-2024](https://thenacc.co.uk/events/meals-on-wheels-week-2024)**



**FREE FOR  
MEMBERS**



**ONLINE  
FORUM**

The HCA are delighted to continue the webinar series to develop the food and drink service within healthcare.

# PATIENT SAFETY

Our next webinar looks at patient safety, covering:

- Allergen accreditation
- Malnutrition & hydration
- The latest on food hygiene
- And a preview of the 2025 HCA Forum



**WEDNESDAY  
22 JANUARY**

Start time: 12.30pm



Book your place at  
**[www.hcawebinars.co.uk](http://www.hcawebinars.co.uk)**



# CATERING SERVICE OF THE YEAR

**THE CATERING TEAM AT GOSPORT WAR MEMORIAL HOSPITAL (GWMH) WERE ANNOUNCED AS THE CATERING SERVICE OF THE YEAR DURING THE AWARD CEREMONY AT THE 'FORUM IN THE GLEN'. SO WHAT MADE THEM CATCH THE ATTENTION OF THE JUDGES?**

**T**he CPU at GWMH produces upwards of 700 cook-freeze meals a day, delivering to 14 sites across Hampshire. It also provides a regeneration operation for 70 clients onsite, and a dining room service to staff and visitors.

The catering team collaborated with their dietetic and speech and language colleagues to go through the menus to ensure that they deliver safe and nutritious meals to meet all their client's needs. The team run food tasting sessions each fortnight with which everyone gets involved, and use feedback forms to maintain standards and make improvements. Involving everyone helps them all to understand how the food should look and taste.

Catering for patients with eating disorders is an integral part of the daily requirement, and the CPU team work very closely with the dietitians in building these meal plans. Flexibility is the key to this work, and they have already introduced an electronic bedside ordering system on site at GWMH, which is being rolled out to the Trust's other 14 sites, giving training and support to staff to enable them to use the system.

Food wastage is monitored through Guardians of Grub. The kitchen waste for the CPU returns from the regen ward service are recorded. Reducing the amount of food provided has led to cost savings of over £3k in the first year, and with continuous monitoring they aim to



reduce this further to £5k by continuing to improve on production waste.

## BUILDING THE TEAM

The catering team's innovation isn't just targeted at the patients. As a department they strive for good staff morale, looking to encourage staff development. For some years they have provided onsite NVQ standard training and actively encouraged positive succession planning. When the Head Chef recently retired, the role was widely advertised but the job went to one of the existing team members, who is

now being supported through his supervisory training and looking forward to his ongoing catering management training.

Team members made their first appearance at the Wessex Branch Salon Culinaire earlier this year, earning some favourable comments. They are already planning for next year when they hope to win their first medal.

Chris Frith, Senior Support Services Manager and Head of Catering says: "The catering team at GWMH, headed up by Dave Barber, are doing an excellent job. We believe this is a recipe that keeps our staff retention steady, achieves good continuity and enthusiasm, and we are seeing the fruits of a happy team. We have signed up two apprentices for this year and we see the benefits of planning our future."

Fiona Sinclair, Branch Secretary of the Wessex Branch is their Food Safety Authorised Person. In her nomination of the team she said: "What struck me with the team at the GWMH

CPU was their openness to collaborate and adopt new ways of working, in order to strive for continual improvement of systems and quality, to benefit patients. This is illustrated by the CPU spearheading the launch and coordination of the bedside meal ordering system across the Trust. Senior leadership demonstrate high commitment to safety and compliance."

Overall, things are looking good for the patients, staff and visitors of the Southern Health NHS Foundation Trust, and long may it continue.

# FOOD TOPS THE AGENDA AT THE 2025 HCA FORUM

## HILTON BIRMINGHAM METROPOLE, APRIL 1-2, 2025

**THE LEADERSHIP & DEVELOPMENT FORUM 2025 IS ONLY SIX MONTHS AWAY, AND THE NORTH WEST BRANCH ARE INCREDIBLY EXCITED ABOUT THE CONFERENCE PROGRAMME THAT THEY HAVE DEVELOPED AND THE ENTERTAINMENT THEY WILL BE PROVIDING.**

**T**he 'Food at our Core' theme speaks for itself, and the plan is to bring all the conversations back to what we do best – producing healthy, nutritious and sustainable food for our customers.

The Forum Management Team (FMT) is being led by Forum Secretary Tim Radcliffe with the support of:

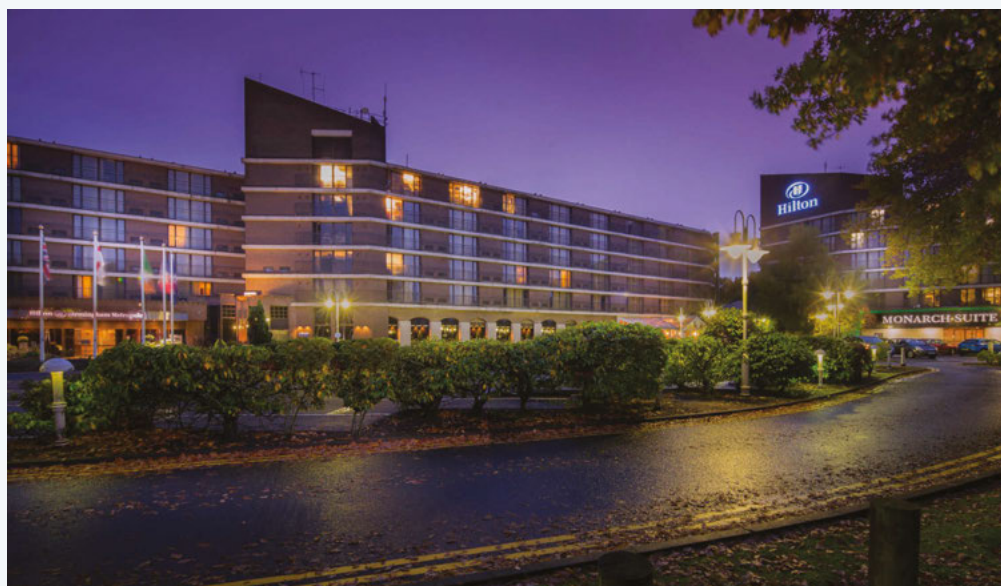
- Debra Armstrong
- Duncan O'Neill
- Michael Eastman
- Andrew Dunne
- Hannah Ainley
- Laura Hariani
- Nicola Horsfield
- Charlotte Warrington
- Paul Franks

They are being supported by Dewberry Redpoint.

### WHAT TO EXPECT

The programme is nearly complete, and we will share more details in the next issue of Hospital Caterer. We are delighted to announce that TV presenter Mark Durden-Smith has agreed to be this year's Forum Facilitator and Awards host, so we can expect some fun along the way.

As you are all aware, the annual Leadership and Development Forum is where the HCA hosts its awards ceremony. These prestigious awards form an important part of the Tuesday night President's Dinner. I would encourage every Branch to give serious consideration to the categories in this year's awards and submit their nominations. Further



### HCA LEADERSHIP & DEVELOPMENT FORUM

**Tuesday 1st - Wednesday 2nd April 2025 - Hilton Birmingham Metropole**

information regarding the award categories will be available via the HCA website in the next few weeks and in the November/December issue of the Hospital Caterer.

The Branch Dinner theme and details will also be revealed in the coming weeks. This will take place on the Wednesday evening, giving people the chance to head home on the Thursday and catch up with emails before the week is out.

The FMT looks forward to seeing you in the heart of the country for what will be a wonderful and inspiring Forum. Please visit the website for regular updates ([www.hcaforum.co.uk](http://www.hcaforum.co.uk)) and book your place.

If you have any queries, contact any of the Forum Management Team, or speak to Jo or Laura, by calling 0203 398 0199 or emailing: [HCAForum@dewberryredpoint.co.uk](mailto:HCAForum@dewberryredpoint.co.uk).



## LOVE BRITISH FOOD CALLS ON THE GOVERNMENT TO EMBRACE COMMUNITY-FOCUSED FOOD STRATEGY

During British Food Fortnight, the annual celebration of quality British food and drink, Love British Food issued a call to action for the new Government, highlighting the value of local food production and the need for a food strategy that promotes sustainability, education and public health. It has issued a selection of proposals ranging from simple and inexpensive steps to those requiring more radical change supported by policy.

Proposals for action that could be done immediately, within existing budgets include establishing cross-departmental cooperation on food policy, prioritising community engagement with organisations, businesses and community leaders who are already delivering change, moving beyond targets to focus on enabling catering teams to connect food procurement with nutritional outcomes, and encouraging foodservice organisations and wholesalers to feature a 'Buy British' category.

Steps that would require budget reallocation include food education in schools linked with nutrition and wellbeing, clearer food labelling to highlight provenance and links with nutrition, and investing in promoting quality British food to the domestic consumer rather than export markets.

In the longer term, Love British Food proposes free and healthy school meals for all children and investment in British agriculture alongside encouragement to public institutions to incorporate such produce as part of a balanced menu.

The Love British Food Hospital and Care Working Group is championing buying British across the nation's hospitals, organising farm visits and facilitating the sharing of information and ideas about how to encourage nutritious, quality British produce onto hospital menus and showcase it. Find out more about this initiative, including case studies, on the Love British Food website: [lovebritishfood.co.uk/love-british-food-hospitals-and-care-catering-working-group](http://lovebritishfood.co.uk/love-british-food-hospitals-and-care-catering-working-group).

Hospital Caterer would like to hear from caterers who introduced special menus or held events during British Food Fortnight to celebrate British Food. Please send us your photos (large files please, suitable for print).



## OXFORD BRANCH

*Report by Craig Smith*

At our last meeting, the Branch was pleased to welcome Fiona Sinclair, Founder and Director of Inspectrum, food safety in healthcare. Fiona is also secretary of the Wessex Branch. She joined the meeting to provide an invaluable food safety update and to give the members the chance to ask questions.

The presentation started by looking at product recalls and an update on Listeria. This was topical as there had been a recent recall from a major sandwich provider. Fiona reminded us of two important FSA publications: 'Reducing the risk of vulnerable groups contracting Listeriosis' and a quick reference guide, 'Food traceability, withdrawals and recalls within the UK Food Industry', which contains a quick and simple guide to traceability, with a decision tree, templates and key contacts. Find the publications here:

[food.gov.uk/sites/default/files/media/document/listeria-guidance-june2016-rev.pdf](http://food.gov.uk/sites/default/files/media/document/listeria-guidance-june2016-rev.pdf)

[food.gov.uk/sites/default/files/media/document/food-traceability-withdrawals-and-recalls-guidance.pdf](http://food.gov.uk/sites/default/files/media/document/food-traceability-withdrawals-and-recalls-guidance.pdf)

The talk then smoothly moved to the 5°C Food Chain, which is of special importance to all hospital caterers as it requires attention beyond the current regulations. The rate at which Listeria monocytogenes doubles in number is twice as fast at 8°C compared to 5°C.

Once permission has been given, the Branch will share the slides of this interesting talk.

Our focus now moves to Thursday, October 10, as this issue goes to press, when we will be holding another one of our popular Dragon's Den events.

## UPDATE ON PROGRESS TOWARDS OUR NEW WEBSITE AND MEMBERSHIP SERVICES

During 2023, the Executive Management Team explored the possibility of a centralised membership service. It was also noted that our current website was in need of a complete overhaul. Expressions of interest were sought from third parties and a full specification issued.

Four businesses responded to the first papers, which helped us refine our requirements. A tender was then issued with two elements:

- Website – design, build and maintenance
- Centralised Membership System – build and management.

Responses have now been received and a detailed review has been undertaken by the Executive. As we go to press, a recommendation is being prepared for the Board of Directors. This project will represent a significant improvement in the Association's ability to communicate with its members, industry partners and the wider community. Look out for a full report in the next edition of Hospital Caterer.

## NORTHERN IRELAND BRANCH

*Report by Clodagh Hastings*

On September 4, La Mon House Hotel transformed into a gourmet think tank for the highly anticipated Study Day for the Northern Ireland Branch, themed 'Let's Champion Food'. With the room buzzing with 84 food enthusiasts, health experts and those just eager for a good meal (who could blame them?), this event showcased not only the importance of food safety and sustainability but also our innate desire to indulge in delightful culinary experiences.

The day kicked off with the classic combination of registration and refreshments. Attendees were treated to a selection of biscuits and brews that would have made even the most refined tea aficionados nod in approval.

With the clock striking 9:40, the event officially began. Karen McLaughlin, Branch Chair and Janice Gillan, HCA National Secretary, welcomed participants. Their warm and witty introductions set an engaging tone, reinforcing the message: food matters, and so does how we engage with it.

**Learning and laughing was the agenda for the heart of the day.**

Training sessions kicked off with David Coyne tackling the ever-pressing issue of food waste – a topic that, unfortunately, leaves a sour taste in many mouths. Following this, Andrew Dunne introduced IDDSI (International Dysphagia Diet Standardisation Initiative), and clarified how to ensure every bite and sip is safe and sound for those with swallowing difficulties. Who knew there were so many levels to the texture of food? It felt like the food equivalent of learning a new language!

During the well-deserved morning break, attendees took the opportunity to mingle, and collect delicious tidbits of knowledge (and probably a few extra cookies). After the break, Derek and Tina Thompson brought the gluten free movement front and centre, showcasing options that would satisfy even the most discerning palate. Who said gluten free had to mean flavour-free?

Next, we dove into sustainability with Garry Sweeney discussing FSG Returnable. He made an impactful case for reusable food and drinkware in the NHS – highlighting that not only is it better for the planet, but it also adds a sprinkle of class to every patient's meal.

While attendees enjoyed a well-catered lunch, creative discussions sparked around tables, and the highly competitive sticker challenge brought a playful twist to networking. Who doesn't love some friendly competition, especially when food is involved?

Post-lunch, the crowd was re-energized by Russell Ramage's session on Listeria. It's not exactly what you'd call light lunchtime reading, but vital knowledge for food safety in any setting!

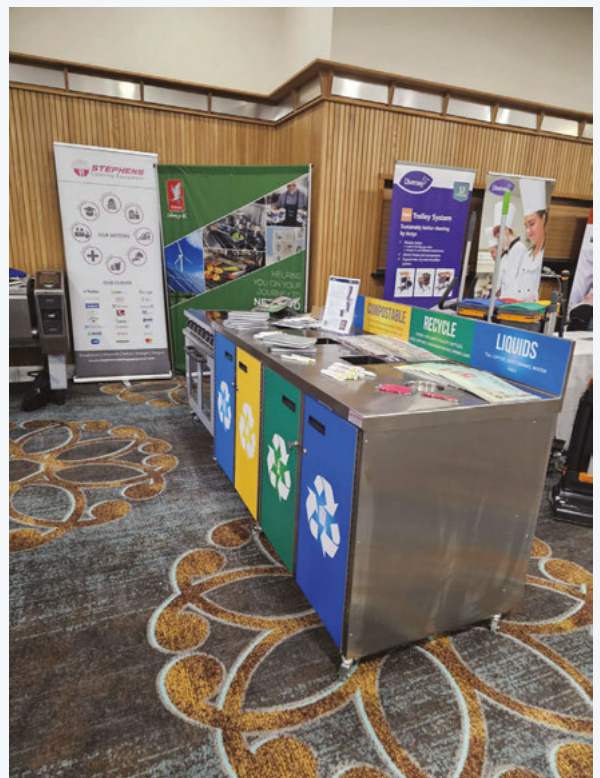
Trish Twohig followed with a presentation on food safety, ensuring that we all left knowing that a good chef isn't just measured by their knife skills but their awareness of food safety.

Jill Stewart wrapped up the talks with 'Food for Thought', leaving us with more than just dietary regulations, but a hunger for making food choices that enrich health and wellbeing.

Karen McLaughlin and Janice Gillan concluded the programme with a raffle to encourage participation in the sticker challenge. Who could resist the allure of prizes?

The 'Let's Champion Food' Study Day was not just an informative event but a feast for the senses and intellect alike. Attendees walked away with new insights, connections and perhaps a few extra pounds (we mean in knowledge and laughter, of course).

We'd like to extend our warm thanks to all speakers, participants, and organisers for making this event a savoury success! Until next time – let's keep championing food together!





## DIARY DATE



The HCA's Webinar working group has announced the first of two events planned for 2025 will be held on January 22 from 12.30 – 14.00. The theme will be **Patient Safety**. Please put the date in your diary and look out for more information on this in the next issue of Hospital Caterer.



## YORKSHIRE BRANCH

*Report by Ellen Clayton*

The Yorkshire Branch had a fabulous meeting in York back in June. Hosted by Ruth at Nestlé, the Branch was treated to presentations on Fairtrade and Sustainable Practice with Starbucks, Nestlé Confectionery and Nescafé. The hosts treated us to a 'spin the wheel' competition over a delicious lunch. We then held our business meeting in the afternoon, where we welcomed two new faces to our committee: Gareth Williams is our new Regional Chair and Matt Charlton is our new Treasurer Designate. We also thanked Howard Cartledge for his many years of support to the Branch in various guises – latterly as our outgoing Chair. Ellen has agreed to stay on as Regional Secretary and Richard is continuing as Board Director.

Looking forward, the next in-person meeting is to be a joint seminar on November 21, with the National Association of Care Catering at the AJ Bell Stadium in Salford. This event is called: *'From Green Choices to Healthy Minds: Zeroing in on Sustainability and Mental Health'*.

In a world where sustainability is more critical than ever, it's becoming clear that our choices impact not just the planet, but our mental and physical wellbeing. This seminar will dive deep into the powerful connection between diet, sustainability and mental health, offering practical insights you can apply immediately. We will also be hosting an exhibition. Please contact ellen.clayton@supplychain.nhs.uk to book your place.

## WEST OF SCOTLAND BRANCH

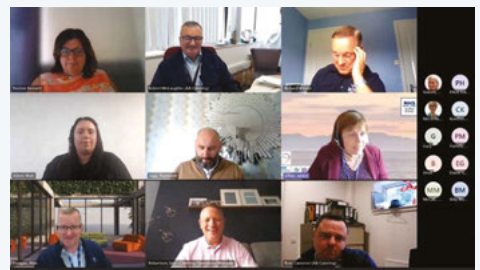
*Report by Margaret Valenti*

The Branch held its last meeting on August 8 via Microsoft Teams. We were honoured to have our national Chair, Iain Robertson join us to

talk through the HCA Strategy document where he discussed the five strategic priorities: Membership, Education, Partnership Working, Financial Stability and Governance.

The next meeting will be held on October 31, once again on Teams. The focus will be on the 'Single Use Disposables Cup Change Consultation'. A member of the Scottish Government has been invited to come along and speak on the subject.

The Branch AGM and Christmas Lunch is currently being organised for Thursday, December 5.





# UP AND RUNNING

IT'S BEEN A BUSY SUMMER FOR THE HCA, AS IAIN ROBERTSON REPORTS.

**T**he big news from the Executive Team this month is that the programme to centralise the membership administration and develop a new website is progressing nicely. This has been a major piece of work, and we are delighted to see it coming to fruition.

Responses to the tender have been reviewed and a recommendation has been made to the Board. In the coming days I expect to announce the successful bidder and then we will waste no time before meeting with them so work can start on building the new website and creating the centralised membership process. One of the big benefits of this is that Branch treasurers will no longer have the laborious and time-consuming task of issuing Branch member invoices as it will all be done centrally. Issuing this year's invoices will be delayed to allow time for this work to conclude.

## WORKING GROUPS

In the last issue of Hospital Caterer, I spoke about the strategy and how we need to move forward on its objectives. Two working groups are now up and running and progress is being made. The Webinar working group has decided to hold two HCA Online Forums in 2025, on January 22 and September 24, both from 12.30 – 14.00. These events are timed

and planned to complement the National Forum and add value for members with impactful content. They will have a theme, but it will be overarching rather than specific, allowing for a broader focus of discussion. In January, the Online Forum will focus on Patient Safety, with speakers to address topics around malnutrition and hydration, food hygiene and intolerances. Please put the dates in your diary and we will bring you more details in due course.

The Membership working group is also making good progress. Our National Vice Chair, Nicola Strawther is leading this group, and she presented a paper at the last Board meeting to explore new membership categories. One of these is a development membership designed for more junior members of staff, and a second is a corporate membership level for Trusts or Health Boards. The Board gave its approval for the group to continue this work, explore the potential of the new categories and the benefits they would need to deliver to members.

## OUT AND ABOUT

In the five months since becoming National Chair, I have attended many Branch meetings and events, including eight of the 15 regional Branches, either online or in person. I've presented the strategy to several of the Branches, updated members on what is happening

nationally, as well as what they can do, on a local level, to make sure the objectives of the strategy are delivered. The most recent event, which I had the pleasure of hosting, was the Trent Branch Study Day. This was a well organised and interesting day, themed around Topics off the Norm – and the content certainly did reflect this, for instance, with presentations on eating and drinking for the neurodiverse, and ultra processed foods. It was an inspiring day with lots of supplier support.

The Northern Ireland Branch has also held its study day. Janice Gillan and Margaret Valenti represented the national team at this event, which is always a brilliant day. It's good to see so many Branches holding study days. It shows that we have a really active Branch network out there, which is to be commended.

As well as our own events, I've also represented the HCA at the TUCO summer conference which took place at Exeter University, and I'm looking forward to the NACC Training and Development Forum at the East Midlands Conference Centre in the coming days. And finally, as this issue goes to press, the final week of NHS Chef is about to get underway, and I'd like to wish the eight chef teams from Trusts across England that have made it through this process the very best of luck in York.

**Iain Robertson, National Chair Director**

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