The newly modernised Central Production Unit in Treorchy

The General Manager of the Central Production Unit (CPU) at Cwm Taff Health Board was given every catering manager’s dream, a blank canvas, the time and the budget to convert an existing building into a purpose designed unit.

Based in Treorchy since 1988, this central food production facility began as a cook-chill unit, transferring to cook-freeze in 1998, and providing services to Velindre Hospital as well as the whole of the Cwm Taf Health Board.

As part of its catering strategy the Health Board decided to extend the facility to help deliver its aims of:

- maintaining high standards of food production
- providing consistently high quality
- promoting efficiency.

To achieve those aims Alison Howells, the General Manager, was given a rare treat in January 2011 - an empty building, a budget of £2m and the time necessary to make sure that the new unit would be both efficient and suited to the required methods and style of food produced.

Being well known for her painstaking and meticulous approach to the business of food production, Alison worked for eight weeks with the designers to establish the layout and get the unit fully operational.

Designed with the future in mind and using the organisation’s accumulated years of experience, new equipment was procured and new cooking methods introduced as well as new routes to market and how to get ‘from gate to plate’.

The unit, adjacent to the existing Treorchy CPU, provides over 300,000 meals each year for the Health Board, including both the Prince Charles and Royal Glamorgan Hospitals, and in these days of collaboration has the potential to supply other public sector partners in the future.

By October 2011 Alison Howells’ dream was reality. An insight into her life as General Manager of the CPU follows.

A Day in the life of a Catering Manager

As General Manager for Cwm Taf Health Board’s Central Production Kitchen (CPU) Alison Howells is responsible for a staff of 30, including qualified caterers, clerical and ancillary staff. The success of the CPU is built on team work and Alison’s view is that everyone in the organisation is responsible for the success of the unit, from those receiving the raw materials, preparing, producing and cooking the food right through to the process of blast freezing and storage.

One of Alison’s many pleasures is the investment in capital funds made by the Cwm Taf Health Board to ensure the long term commitment to the CPU in Treorchy and until recently much of her day was devoted to planning and organising the creation of the new unit.

Alison often works very long days to ensure that the service is fully staffed at all times with the first of the two shifts starting at 6.30am and the late shift finishing at 7.30pm. The development of the new unit will now allow food to be produced twenty four hours a day, seven days a week and, although this will require a third shift, it will now enable expansion to other organisations.

To ensure that meals are delivered to their destination in the same condition that they leave the care of Alison and her team, two specialised 7.5 ton lorries are used. Each has a frozen compartment with a temperature of -20°C and a smaller chilled compartment, for items +5°C.

All the food leaving the unit has to be labelled according to Food Standards Agency (FSA) requirements. These labels, held in the automated labelling system, contain information such as the name of the food, e.g. cottage pie, ingredients, date produced, use by date and cooking instructions.

Alison is involved in overseeing the introduction of the new Menumark system which updates and replaces a number of systems in use since 1988. The new system will provide:

- Full stock control
- Recipe costing
- Financial reporting & invoices/bills
- Cook chill/freeze information module
- Container label printing
- Menu planning
- Production reporting

These features will assist Alison in her task of ensuring the CPU complies with all current and future policies and legislation.
Although there is a product list including over 150 different recipes with all their associated dietetic and nutritional values, a particularly enjoyable part of Alison’s day is developing new recipes. She devises recipes to ensure that, as with all her menus, no ingredients are wasted and instructions are followed exactly by all the cooking staff.

Although not as enjoyable as creating recipes, making certain that all the stringent food and hygiene regulations are followed, is a vital part of her day. Working practices and procedures are monitored using the Hazard Analysis Critical Control Points (HACCP) documentation to ensure that food safety and quality is maintained at all times. This documentation has to be available for the twice yearly unannounced visits of the Environmental Health Officer’s as well as for the audits conducted by the Food Standards Agency and Support Training Services. Achieving accreditation to the required standards is essential to enable the CPU to provide food to external organisations.

It is a recognised fact that a patient’s recovery is helped by nutritious, appetising food and Alison’s leadership, her pride in her staff and their dedication to providing quality meals ensures that this is exactly what Cwm Taf Health Board’s Central Production Unit provides.

An upmarket coffee shop in a hospital? It’s not possible... but it is.

The Cwm Taf Health Board was looking for innovative ways to improve the catering service it offered to patients and staff. Was a 21st century coffee shop something that would appeal to everyone with distinctive coffees, tasty snacks and luscious cakes? They made the bold decision to follow their noses and now the smell of coffee wafts out of Bar Barista in the Royal Glamorgan Hospital.

The new service had to be distinguished from the existing catering facilities and create an impression of an upmarket high street coffee shop and in November 2011 Bar Barista opened its doors with the important ‘something different’ factor.

It is managed and run by the Health Board and specialised training was provided for a number of members of the hospital catering staff. From that group five were selected to staff the new facility with the rest being able to use their new skills in developing the existing hospital restaurant. The Bar Barista staff now have distinctive red, black and white uniforms matching the overall coffee shop colour scheme.

The products offered are also very different from those available in the rest of the hospital, an important issue to prevent loss of income at the existing catering facilities.

Electronic itemised tills are used to reduce waste and enable weekly analyses to be undertaken to find out the best and least popular products which allows the menu to be adjusted accordingly.

The coffee shop has been so successful that it has exceeded its income targets in the first three months of opening and it is now also open at the weekend.

So if you’re in the vicinity of the Royal Glamorgan why not pop into Bar Barista for a slice of the continental life. Coffee and cake anyone?

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