Day in the Life of the Catering Service

ABMU’s Catering Service is responsible for providing food and drink for patients, staff and visitors across all of its hospital sites. The four acute hospitals, Neath Port Talbot, Morriston, Princess of Wales and Singleton all run a catering service, preparing the food on each site, as well as for their neighbouring ABMU hospitals.

Each team consists of a variety of different roles including chefs, catering assistants, storeroom staff, administration assistants and catering managers, as well as staff working in the shops and restaurants. The teams at Singleton and Neath Port Talbot Hospitals also have ward hostesses.

Irene Crouch is the Food Services Manager at Singleton Hospital:

“Work begins in the main service area at 6am. The temperatures of the storeroom fridges and freezers are tested and compared with those of the night before to ensure that they have worked correctly throughout the night.

“Deliveries are made to the catering stores, and checked by staff to ensure the order is correct. They also take the temperature of all the fresh and frozen products to make sure they are suitable for use, if not they are returned to the supplier and replacements are asked for. Everything is then stored in the appropriate place. There are a number of fridges and freezers which means that the new deliveries can be kept separate from the products which are about to be used.”

Another part of the storeroom role is to get the ingredients ready for the food to be prepared. The first meal to be prepared is the patients’ breakfast. The wards send their requirements from stores of what they need the day before, so it can be prepared first thing.

Next, the ingredients for the main meals have to be organised. As part of infection control methods, food cannot be taken into the kitchens in tins or boxes, so it needs to be emptied into special containers. A member of the storeroom staff takes responsibility for this, following the recipes used by the chefs. Each day is colour coordinated so, staff in the kitchen know they have taken the correct container of ingredients.
The kitchens currently have a two week menu and each day has a minimum of three hot options for patients and staff to choose from. They are prepared two weeks in advance, from scratch, using standardised recipes.

Mark Loosmore, Chef at Singleton Hospital, said:

“I really enjoy my job as I love to cook, but I also enjoy making food for the patients to enjoy during their stay in hospital. It is nice to hear patients say that they have enjoyed what we have prepared as patient satisfaction is vital.”

Once the meals are cooked, they are decanted into food trays and taken into the blast freezer. The food needs to reach a temperature of -18°C within 240 minutes. If it isn’t it, it is either served that day in the restaurants or put into the chiller and served within five days. Those which do reach the required temperature are labelled, dated, then transported to the storage freezers and used within three months.

Irene explained:

“By freezing the meals, it helps to reduce waste as the meals are reheated as they are required. It can mean that as little as three per cent of the food is left as waste. Also, in situations such as bad weather, having food already prepared means there is minimal disruption to the catering
“For patients, staff and visitors who would prefer a lighter option, we make fresh salads and sandwiches on a daily basis. We also prepare fresh desserts, both hot and cold.

“We have a section which caters for people with special dietary needs, such as vegetarians, diabetics, those with allergies or those who may only be able to eat soft foods. The majority of these meals are normally made when a patient has been admitted to the hospital. However, a few extra portions are made and frozen, so there is always something ready just in case.

Special meals for patients who follow certain religions, such as Halal foods, are bought readymade to ensure they have been appropriately prepared.”

Once all the food has been prepared, everything needs to be cleaned and sterilised. Catering assistants load all the containers, utensils, pots and pans onto an industrial dishwasher, this ensures that everything is clean and sterile for use as required. The floors, units and all aspects of the kitchen area are also cleaned and disinfected after every shift.

The catering service also has responsibility for the restaurants within ABMU hospitals. As well as preparing the food to be sold, they serve the customers and ensure that the areas are kept clean and tidy at all times. They order the products sold in the shops and the restaurants which they can’t prepare, such as crisps and chocolates, and keep the shelves stocked.

Additional members to the teams at the Neath Port Talbot and Singleton Hospitals are ward hostesses. Each ward has their own hostess, who starts the day by providing each patient with fresh water. They then set up for breakfast, offering patients the choice of cereals and tea and coffee. Whilst serving breakfast, they also inform patients of the options available for lunch and note their choice.

Judy Cotter, Ward 4 Hostess at Singleton Hospital, said:

“I really enjoy my job. You get to know the patients and feel that you are having an impact on their stay. Having a hostess on the
ward enables patients to ask us questions about the food and we can also see if they are enjoying it.”

Mid morning the hostesses will go down to the kitchens to collect the meals for lunch. By ward staff taking the orders and collecting the food themselves, it helps to reduce the waste as they know the quantities of each option to take, especially as they know their patients and the amount they will eat.

Once they have collected the food, they heat it using specialist regeneration trolleys on the ward. After patients have finished eating, they collect the plates and wash all the crockery on the ward, which avoids losing these items and the possibility of cross contamination. The hostesses will also make a note of patients who aren’t eating their meals and report it to the nursing staff so the situation can be monitored.

Catering Assistants also work in the newsagents shop at Singleton Hospital. As well as providing a service for those who use the shop, they also take magazines, newspaper, toiletries, confectionery and drinks onto the wards for patients to purchase.