

## Hospital Food and the Catering Mark

Disease linked to poor dietary choices now costs the NHS almost £11 billion to treat: £5.8 billion on overweight/obesity-related ill health and £5.1 billion on poor diet-related ill health<sup>1</sup>. At a time when budgets are being squeezed, and with the rising challenges of diet-related diseases, food served in hospitals has a vital role to play. Appetising, healthy and freshly prepared food should be the norm in hospitals. Food is medicine, and it is widely recognised that it should be an integral part of good patient care.

A growing number of hospitals are working to achieve the [Food for Life Catering Mark](#) for food served to their patients and visitors. The scheme provides a clear framework of standards to improve food on the plate, rewarding caterers for making healthy eating easier and including fresh, local, seasonal, organic and higher welfare products. Nearly 10,000 meals are being served to Bronze or Silver Catering Mark Standards in hospitals and care settings every day.

Hospitals that serve good local and seasonal produce often get the best value for their money as the benefits are multiple: the food is traceable, offering reassurance to consumers; food is often fresher; food miles are reduced; and costs are kept down by making the most of seasonal abundance. Developing relationships with local producers can have great benefits for the local economy too; studies showing a £3 social return on investment for every £1 spent on Food for Life Catering Mark menus, mostly in the form of new contracts and jobs for local food producers.

In many cases procuring locally has actually cut costs. In Nottingham University Hospitals NHS Trust, for example, costs were cut by cooking their own hams using pork from a local pig farmer. They also use cheaper cuts of better quality meat. In North Bristol NHS Trust, through developing the local market for products such as ice cream and cheese, local suppliers have now been awarded contracts in other NHS Trusts. Good practice is spreading, and a growing number of hospitals are leading by example.

The good news doesn't stop there – figures release by the Health and Social Care Information Centre in 2013 showed that all English hospitals serving menus to Catering Mark Standards had lower than average costs. These costs included ingredient spend and other related catering costs and help demonstrate that it is possible to serve well-sourced, fresh food which is also affordable.

In the Soil Association we believe that feeding patients good, fresh food is crucially important, and that food across the whole hospital should reflect a positive food culture. Hospitals should lead by example, showcasing how good food culture can support and enhance good health.

Across England some great initiatives are taking place that are bringing good food culture into the heart of hospitals and embedding knowledge, catering skills, habits and practices whose impacts reach far beyond hospital doors.

Thanks to Big Lottery funding, The Soil Association is working with Public Health teams and NHS Trusts to better understand how hospitals might lead by example on food in general, by taking a more strategic 'whole setting' approach. As well as better food for patients, staff and visitors, this might include therapeutic growing, developing meal time support through volunteers, developing

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<sup>1</sup> Scarborough et al. 2011. The Economic burden of ill health due to diet, physical inactivity, smoking, alcohol and obesity in the UK: an update to 2006-07 NHS costs. Journal of Public Health, May 11 2011, pp.1-9

food-based skills, healthier vending and much more. Many examples of such good practice exist already, and this work also aims to build connections and showcase good practice across NHS Trusts.

To find out more about the Food for Life Catering Mark in hospitals contact Suzi Gammon, Catering Mark Coordinator: [sgammon@soilassociation.org](mailto:sgammon@soilassociation.org)

To find out more about the developing wider work on food in hospitals contact Susannah McWilliam, Workplace Health and Hospitals Project Manager: [smcwilliam@soilassociation.org](mailto:smcwilliam@soilassociation.org)

- The Catering Mark in Hospitals: [www.sacert.org/catering/hospitalscaresettings](http://www.sacert.org/catering/hospitalscaresettings)
- Find out about our Hospital Food Leaders Network: [www.soilassociation.org/hospitalfood/hospitalfoodleaders](http://www.soilassociation.org/hospitalfood/hospitalfoodleaders)