

## Help sheet no.5

### Resident satisfaction with meals

Resident satisfaction with meals depends on many variables, including:

- suitability of menu design to the particular needs of the group
- recipes used
- quality of the raw ingredients used
- meal times
- the eating environment
- ability of residents to make choices about the food they eat
- degree of 'wellness' and general wellbeing of the residents
- ability of the menu to meet the special food needs of some residents.

Appropriate options are needed for:

- residents with special needs, for example, those with diabetes mellitus (see **help sheet 12**)
- residents from culturally diverse backgrounds (see **help sheet 15**)
- residents needing texture-modified diets (see **help sheets 13 and 14**)
- residents who have physical or cognitive problems who may have difficulty feeding themselves a standard meal.

A menu that gives residents a choice is considered best practice.

### Resident feedback

Obtaining feedback from residents about the food and their satisfaction with meals is an important part of providing quality care. There are a number of ways to do this:

- **Resident committees**

Resident committees are a useful way for residents to have input into menus. These groups may discuss a range of issues. The main difficulty is that only those who are in the position to have a say contribute to the meeting. It is important to consider ways for those residents who are unable to contribute at a committee to also have a say. It may be helpful to use a combination of feedback methods, like a food satisfaction survey together with suggestions from the committee and by involving carers/family.

- **Food satisfaction surveys**

These surveys gather information from all residents or their relatives about a range of aspects of catering including meal temperature, choice, suitability of recipes, texture, timeliness of meal service and so on.

A periodic survey, however, is only supplementary to other, more routine methods of gathering information about residents' food preferences. (See **help sheet 6 Conducting a resident meal satisfaction survey.**)

- **Routine procedures for collecting residents' food preferences**

Collecting information on individual food preferences is a routine part of the admission assessment. Regular review of preferences ensures that the information is current. Residents also need to be able to exercise daily choice. There is a growing expectation that more than one dish is available at each meal and that residents are asked about what they would like to eat. To control food costs and preparation time, careful menu planning is required. A consultant dietitian who specialises in menu planning in organised care facilities could help.

- **Plate waste surveys**

Sometimes staff remark on the degree of food waste as an indicator of meal quality. Plate waste surveys can be a useful means for checking the popularity of items. However, to compare results of different survey periods or meals, it is important to ensure that there is consistency in portion size (portion control) and that serve sizes are appropriate to the needs of each resident. Plate waste surveys are most useful if the reasons for wastage are noted at the meal, such as:

- dislike of food flavour or food texture
- food too tough
- too much food
- food too cold or warm
- illness or no appetite
- takes a long time to eat meals.

Measuring plate waste with the use of a Food and Fluid Record can also be a helpful tool in determining the food needs of residents. Where a resident easily consumes the quantity of food offered, yet is losing weight, larger serves and/or supplementation may be required. A resident who regularly leaves food is likely to need special foods and supplementation. Where these difficulties are occurring regularly, residents may also need or benefit from dietetic assessment and advice.

### **Useful resources**

Boldy, D., & Grencole, L., *Seeking the consumer view in aged care facilities: a practical guide*.

*Strategies for providing culturally appropriate care: a practical guide for aged care facilities*, Department of Health and Aged Care, Ph: (02) 6289 5424 for a copy.