

Progress in Practice

Royal Brompton Hospital Food Project

As part of the London Hospital Food Project, the Royal Brompton Hospital has successfully increased the amount of local and organic food served in staff restaurants, retail outlets and wards.

Summary

The Royal Brompton Hospital (RBH) has been working with Sustain: The Alliance for Better Food and Farming, as one of four hospitals associated with the London Hospital Food Project aiming to procure 10% of its food from local/organic sources. During the past two years the RBH has exceeded this target, 20% of the food it serves is local and/or organic, and this success led to a shortlisting for the HSJ Award for Good Corporate Citizenship 2007.

The Hospital Food Project was part of a holistic approach to food procurement and eating which has now evolved into the Good Food on the Public Plate project.

Providing nutritional (often organic) food enables patients to recover more quickly and helps staff and visitors maintain a good diet. Setting a good example in hospital can also influence people's dietary choices when at home.

Being able to offer appetizing meals made with fresh ingredients not only has numerous health benefits, but also helps to minimise waste and tackle climate change by cutting down on the transportation of food, as well as contributing to the local economy.

The manager of the Catering Department, Mike Duckett, has stopped working with some of the hospital's large scale suppliers because they could not make any changes in favour of buying local and/or organic produce. Instead, the Hospital now buys from smaller suppliers; for example, free range eggs from Kent; bread from Kilburn, London; and mushrooms that are grown under the North Circular Road.



Mike Duckett, Catering Manager, Royal Brompton & Harefield NHS Trust, commented:

"Our patients say meals are tastier and they feel that supporting local suppliers and farmers is important. The patient satisfaction percentage at RBH is 20% above the national average, providing firm evidence that the improvements to food quality and procurement were a success."

Links and organisations involved: Royal Brompton & Harefield Trust: <http://www.rbht.nhs.uk/>; Sustain: The Alliance for Better Food and Farming <http://www.sustainweb.org>; Good Food on the Public Plate: www.gfpp.org.uk

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Challenges overcome

Success hasn't been easy, and there have been challenges along the way: resources and time. Although it is sometimes initially more expensive to buy local/organic food, the money is being invested in patient and staff health and in the long-term will pay back in quicker patient recovery times and a healthier workforce and local population.

RBH negotiated directly with local suppliers and organic buyers regarding prices. They found that certain companies were already supplying local schools (for example) with organic food, so negotiated with them on behalf of the NHS to get a good price. At RBH, £3.50 is spent on food per adult patient per day, and £3.20 per child patient per day, above the national average of £2.90. Mike Duckett feels it is important to remember that the quality of their food is high and is all prepared on site, including cakes for afternoon tea!

Another concern was that it would take too much time to re-train catering staff, re-write menus and find new suppliers. However, the menus are regularly changed anyway, so RBH devoted one week purely to writing up a new menu with new ideas that would maximise all the new produce they were using. They also got everybody involved (dietitians, catering staff etc.) which greatly reduced the work load.



Showing some initiatives

The RBH's sustainable food procurement initiatives include:

- serving organic meat to patients one day per week
- buying Fairtrade products, for example, bananas, coffee, tea and sugar sachets
- making soups on-site with locally grown organic vegetables (soup consumption is now up 40%!)
- including healthier options in vending machines
- using organic coffee in coffee machines
- serving organic milk to patients, staff and visitors
- using old vegetable oil for bio diesel to fuel delivery vehicles

RBH and beyond...

RBH have worked with Sustain/LDA on new free training courses for chefs and food service staff working in London hospitals. The courses include NVQs, customer liaison and training on using local food or an organic alternative.

The RBH catering services continue to work with Sustain on the "Good Food on the Public Plate" project. This project aims to work with at least twenty hospitals, five care homes and five schools in London and the South East to increase the amount of sustainable food being served as part of their routine catering.

Future Plans:

- A partnership is being developed with a local farm to compost food waste produced in the hospital
- Currently a total of 5,000 plastic cups are used per week, and RBH are now in the process of moving over to recyclable paper cups and serviettes
- An organic sandwich range for the Trust will be produced in the evenings in a local school kitchen

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