

MANDATORY, CONTRACTUAL FOOD STANDARDS FOR HOSPITALS

The Department of Health - 29 August 2014

The NHS will have mandatory food standards and hospitals will be ranked on food quality as part of a wide-ranging drive to raise standards of hospital food across the country.

- **mandatory food standards in the NHS contract** for the first time
- hospitals rated for food quality on NHS Choices

The mandatory requirements were selected from over 50 food quality standards. These will now be included in the NHS Standard Contract – making them legally-binding for hospitals. They include:

- Hospitals should screen patients for malnutrition and patients should have a food plan
- Hospitals must take steps to ensure patients get the help they need to eat and drink, including initiatives such as protected meal times where appropriate
- Hospital canteens must promote healthy diets for staff and visitors – the food offered will need to comply with government recommendations on salt, saturated fats and sugar
- Food must be sourced in a sustainable way so that it is healthy, good for individuals and for our food industry

In addition to the panel's compulsory standards, it has also recommended all hospitals develop a food and drink policy that aims to encourage healthy eating, high-quality food production, sustainability and excellent nutritional care.

Complementing the new standards, the Secretary of State for Health, Jeremy Hunt, has announced **hospitals will, for the first time, be ranked** on the NHS Choices website **for the quality of their food**. The latest patient inspections data has been published on NHS Choices and shows how each hospital performs on:

- Quality of food
- Food available between meals
- Choice of food
- Choice of breakfast
- Menu approved by a dietitian
- Cost of food services per patient per day
- Fresh fruit always available

Food is a critical part of a patient's hospital experience. It needs to be nutritious, appetising and accessible to patients, their visitors and NHS staff. It should meet social and cultural expectations and be packaged and presented so that people can eat and enjoy it. Food must also be clinically appropriate and everyone who needs more help to eat and drink should get it. When a patient is malnourished it makes recovery more difficult, increases length of stay and can lead to complications such as pressure sores and infections.

Hospitals that do not follow the guidance recommended by the panel would be in breach of their commissioning contract (usually held with a clinical commissioning group), and commissioners will be able to take contractual action against them. The Care Quality Commission (CQC) will use a range of information, including the patient inspection data, to spot potential problems with food and to determine which hospitals need closer inspection of their food practices.

Secretary of State for Health, Jeremy Hunt, said:

'We are making the NHS more transparent, giving patients the power to compare food on wards and incentivizing hospitals to raise their game. Many hospitals are already offering excellent food to their patients and staff. But we want to know that all patients have nourishing and appetising food to help them get well faster and stay healthy, which is why we're introducing tough new mandatory standards for the first time ever.'

NHS England has agreed to include hospital standards in the next NHS Contract, which will be published later this year.