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Deputy Francis Noel Duffy TD
Dáil Éireann
Leinster House
Dublin 2

PQ No. 41518/21

To ask the Minister for Health if there is a national protocol and guidelines for providing food to patients in accident and emergency departments; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

Dear Deputy Duffy,

The Health Service Executive has been requested to reply directly to you in the context of the above Parliamentary Question, which you submitted to the Minister for Health for response. I have examined the matter and the following outlines the position.

Response:

In November 2018, the HSE published The Food, Nutrition and Hydration Policy for Adult Patients to provide a national framework for food, nutritional care and hydration provision for adult patients in acute hospitals.

All locations in acute hospitals are included, Inpatients, Emergency Departments and Day Procedures Units. Currently there is no explicit national protocol for providing food to patients in Emergency Departments (ED).

Guidelines for hospitals offering food in ED depends on:

- The presenting complaint
- Planned investigations
- On-going treatment
- To a lesser extent, the length of time they are in the ED.

ED Waiting Rooms, or adjacent areas, often have vending facilities available containing light refreshments.

7.1.2 Key Recommendations for Food Service Provision

Food Service Provision

1. It is essential that there is a safe, consistent, agreed process of identification and communication of dietary needs between clinical and catering staff/support staff. This is necessary to ensure that individual patients' food and fluid requirements are correctly provided at all times (HIQA, 2016, DOH, 2009).
2. Meals times should be organised around patients' needs and support a patient centred approach to care (HIQA, 2016).
3. All patients (including patients in the Emergency Department who are deemed as admitted but are awaiting transfer to a ward) unless there is a clinical indication to fast and/or are nil by mouth must be provided with the following:
 - I. Three meals (Breakfast, Midday Meal and Evening Meal) should be provided daily
 - II. A minimum of 4 hours or more should be in place between the end of each main meal and the beginning of the next (DOH, 2009)
 - III. Snacks should be provided at a minimum of twice daily. The nutritional content of the snacks must provide the nutrition standard as specified (see section 3.0.) and be suitable for the individual therapeutic and texture modified diets (see section 4.0 and 5.0). A snack trolley should operate twice daily, including an evening snack to reduce the gap between food service
 - IV. All patients must have access to fresh drinking water throughout the day unless nil by mouth
 - V. Water jugs should be replenished twice daily. This may not be appropriate for patients requiring a fluid restriction
 - VI. Patients should be offered access to chilled water where possible and appropriate
 - VII. All aspects of "Making Meal Times Matter" (section 8.0) should be implemented to facilitate optimal food consumption including:
 - Patients who require assistance with eating and drinking must be given timely and adequate assistance to eat
 - Sufficient time should be allocated for patients to eat the food provided.

<https://www.hse.ie/eng/services/publications/hospitals/food-nutrition-and-hydration-policy-for-adult-patients-in-acute-hospital.pdf>

I trust this answers your question to your satisfaction.

Yours sincerely,



Emma Benton

General Manager

Acute Operations