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**Date 10/01/2023**

**Deputy Emer Higgins**

**Re: 57199/23**

**To ask the Minister for Health to outline the efforts being made by the HSE to reduce and reuse food waste, generated by leftover meals prepared for patients, in both public and voluntary care settings.**

Deputy Higgins,

In reference to the above PQ the Health Service Executive (HSE) recognises that it has a significant role to play in tackling the wider climate crisis by dealing with the growing health impacts of climate change and curbing its own emissions. As Ireland's largest Public Body with a core objective to *"use the resources available to it...to improve, promote and protect the health and welfare of the public"*, we have a duty to address climate change. The HSE Climate Action Strategy (2022-2050) focuses on reducing our carbon emissions, promoting low-carbon and sustainable solutions which will help limit pollution, reverse biodiversity loss, and support, and protect the health and well-being of future generations which includes adapting to the impacts of climate change.

As part of this Strategy, consideration is being given to how we can reduce and reuse our food waste. Within the strategy we have a number of work programmes which address this predominantly the waste work programme. Other waste management considerations include, but are not limited to, increasing recycling and reducing the amount of clinical waste generated. In 2024, the Waste Work Programme (made up of a wide range of key stakeholders) are focussed on delivering a current state assessment of what is happening nationally, a review of international best practice and developing guidance which will inform services on priorities for implementation. Part of the strategy is to examine and pilot current best available technology to assist the drive towards food waste reduction. These systems include real time food ordering. Another system of scales and camera's helps identify the type and weight of food currently being wasted and this focus highlights where corrective action is required. Below are some examples of existing work within the HSE in this space:

1. HSE Capital & Estates Climate Action & Sustainability Office Green Healthcare programme has been working on reducing food waste in healthcare. Regular online training on food waste reduction is being delivered to catering staff around the country on an ongoing basis. In addition, in-house training has been carried out in a number of both acute and community hospitals, where all catering staff are brought together in identifying key areas for the site in terms of food waste and actions to take. Food waste awareness is also included in sustainability awareness days held for HSE staff around the country. To find out more about the available training see:

<https://www.hse.ie/eng/about/who/healthbusinessservices/national-health-sustainability-office/waste-prevention/waste-prevention-training/>

2. There are a number of food waste reduction examples nationally and indeed in the Dublin Mid Leinster area. A number of waste surveys have been carried out in hospitals in the area, which included looking at food waste amounts and provision of appropriate bins. Additional internal brown bins have been provided to a number of facilities in the region along with an on-site composter for an office building. One Midlands acute hospital has an ongoing working group on food waste. Further afield, an on-site food waste composter is being piloted in an acute hospital in the west, and in three hospitals around the country, a system for automated food waste tracking is also being piloted.
3. ST James's hospital are tendering an electronic catering solution for patient meal ordering, provision and a meal stock management system. This will enable the Catering Department to have:
  - (i) Food traceability
  - (ii) Food Temperature monitoring
  - (iii) Integrated meal and snack ordering
  - (iv) Stock management processes
  - (v) Reduce food waste

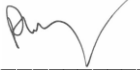
This will allow for full traceability, streamline meal and snack ordering, reduce patient risk, improve efficiencies in record keeping and meal provision processes, while producing real time data in relation to meal orders and stock thus reducing waste.

This will be directly integrated with diet orders and allergy information entered in the hospital's electronic patient record (EPR), and Patient Administration System (PAS) and will be linked to the Food Distribution Unit's (FDU) where patient meal orders will be generated automatically. All external food and beverages will be receipted into the department using barcoding and this will allow for full visibility and a stock management system.

4. The HSE works with the OGP and is cognisant and incorporates relevant guidance from OGP into all procurement frameworks including those related to HSE Food products & services contracts. On the 28th November, the HSE and the Irish Heart Foundation hosted a "Celebration of Excellence in Catering event" at the Gibson Hotel, Dublin. John Swords, National Director for Procurement in the HSE, *spoke about "supporting the transition to more sustainable food procurement"* as part of the HSE Climate Action Strategy (2023-2050) which includes a strategic objective to develop a procured goods and services waste reduction framework and implementation plan.  
<https://hsehealthandwellbeingnews.com/irish-heart-foundation-celebration-of-excellence-in-catering-event/>

If you have any further queries in relation to the above please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,



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**Dr. Philip Crowley,**  
National Director, Strategy and Research

