

Quality Evaluation of Meals served at a Portuguese Hospital

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Introduction: Hospital Food Service must provide food and nutritional support to patients, supplying balanced meals, nutritional counselling and food education.

Objective: The purpose of this study was to characterize sensory and safety and adequacy of meals served at a Hospital Center in the north of Portugal which has a private catering company responsible for the Food Service.

Methodology: A total of 40 meals of regular Diet were evaluated, 10 lunches and 10 dinners in each ward. To collect the information a Check List was drawn. Time of meals' arrival and beginning were registered.

Results: Food Mealtime has never been respected; soup and desert were the primary components which were not according to the menu; transport inadequacy was due to lack of isolation; temperatures were often inadequate; capitations were inadequate in most of the meals evaluated; the main source of protein was red meat; carbohydrate was rice; the supply of legumes and vegetables was very low; the major cooking methods were stewed and fried; the supply of cooked fruit was excessive and the variety of fruit was reduced; meals presentation was satisfactory and acceptance of meals was considered good in general.

Conclusions: The Food Service of this Hospital Centre needs substantially improvements, since the number of non conformities found was significant. The concession of the Food Service to a specialized company with no legal contract and without a regular monitoring has negative implications on the quality of the service. Special concern with meals' presentation is necessary since it greatly influences the acceptance. Periodic evaluations developed by a nutritionist or a specialized technician focusing the degree of satisfaction with meals and service, are necessary to maximize meals acceptance, contributing for a better nutritional status.

Key Words

Food Service, qualitative evaluation of meals, acceptance