Celebrity chefs’ recipes dish up trouble for trusts

By Christian Duffin

NEW HOSPITAL menus designed by celebrity chefs have run into yet more trouble after nurses at one trust labelled the food ‘slop’.

The menus were launched in a £40 million government scheme to overhaul hospital food, but nurses at Blackburn, Hyndburn and Ribble Valley Health Care NHS Trust, Lancashire, say the new fare is no better than before.

Nurse research fellow Samantha Pollitt said she had spoken to about 20 nurses at the trust and was told hospital chefs were struggling to create dishes from the new ingredients.

Getting the right texture and consistency of the mashed potato was especially troublesome, she told the RCN’s European nursing older people conference in York last week.

The trust has not yet fully introduced the new menus, but patients, nurses and dieticians have tested dishes. The government introduced the recipes after consulting a team of top chefs headed by restaurant critic Loyd Grossman. A health department spokesperson said many dishes had been well received at eight pilot sites.

The menu is supposed to cut wastage, increase choice and give patients balanced diets. All NHS trusts in England are expected to introduce it by the end of the year.

‘The menu did not cater for patients with special dietary requirements’

‘The food at Blackburn has been described as slop,’ said Ms Pollitt, from the University of Central Lancashire in Preston. ‘So far the nurses’ opinion is that the menu isn’t working. In our opinion it’s worse. The hospitals chefs are just given ingredients and they have to make the food. They’re not always able to do it.’

The menu did not cater for patients with special dietary requirements, such as those with diabetes or on soft diets, she added.

‘Some dishes, like lamb couscous, weren’t suitable. Other trusts that have contacted the health department about dishes that haven’t worked out.’

Mr Grossman disputed charges that the menus were unresponsive for special dietary needs. ‘We are consistently re-evaluating the menu from feedback we get. Anything that’s unpopular will be off, and we’ll be announcing 51 extra dishes on December 4,’ he said.

The skills of people preparing the food would require careful monitoring, Mr Grossman added.

The chair of the RCN’s Blackburn branch Wilma Taylor, who works in the mental health unit at the trust’s Queens Park Hospital, gave a more mixed verdict. ‘Some patients say they don’t like the new food but others say it’s lovely,’ she said.

Facilities manager Mike Hall said the trust worked hard to develop a quality menu. Some unpopular dishes would not be introduced, but he said many were well received.

Trust chefs were highly qualified. ‘Some dishes, like lamb couscous, weren’t suitable. Other trusts that have contacted the health department about dishes that haven’t worked out.’

The skills of people preparing the food would require careful monitoring, Mr Grossman added.

Trafford’s got star appeal

Bravery awards are being given to children at the Calderdale Royal Hospital in Halifax. Youngsters get a gold star every time they undergo a procedure. When they collect five stars, they receive a small gift. Trafford Howard, pictured, is already on his second card.

Children suffer stigma of HIV

A specialist nurse in children’s HIV services is calling for better understanding of the disease to help youngsters feel less stigmatised.

Margaret Clapsom, HIV nurse specialist at Great Ormond Street Hospital, London, which has the largest UK paediatric clinic for HIV, said: ‘Sadly, the stigma attached to HIV is rife with many of the old misconceptions and anecdotal ways of catching it continuing to dog people’s understanding.’

Ms Clapsom was responding to research by the National Children’s Bureau which found that children and their parents often keep the child’s HIV status a secret.

Nurses taught to identify serial abuse

NURSES ARE learning to identify patients who might be victims of serial abuse or attack through a new post-registration course.

The 12-week degree level module in forensic medicine is being offered by Dundee University. Students are required to analyse patients’ clothing and wounds to identify possible trauma, while also exploring forensic science and criminal psychology.

Nurse lecturer Muriel McCorkindale said uptake of the course and subsequent feedback has been excellent. ‘The training allows nurses to make sense of and interpret injury and injury patterns. It’s of benefit to all nurses and health professionals, particularly those working in A&E.’

She said the training in forensic medicine had helped frontline nurses appreciate the importance of holding on to crucial evidence. ‘It is also good training if nurses are called as professional witnesses.’