



WALES AUDIT OFFICE
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Wales Audit Office / Swyddfa Archwilio Cymru

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Deu Darn

HOSPITAL CATERING AND PATIENT NUTRITION

The Clerk's letter of 17 April 2012 requested my advice on the response by the Welsh Government to the Committee's recent report on *Hospital Catering and Patient Nutrition*. In overall terms, the Welsh Government's response is a positive one. The actions proposed are appropriate and should help address the areas of concern set out in the Committee's report. Moreover, there are clear and realistic timescales attached to most of the actions that the Welsh Government proposes to take, which should assist with any subsequent review of progress.

There has already been progress in some important areas, notably through the issuing of guidance to NHS bodies on protected meal times (as required in **Recommendation 1**), and also in relation to wider use of our guidance, *'Eating Well in Hospital – What You Should Expect'* (as set out in **Recommendation 2**). Indeed, in relation to the latter, the Wales Audit Office has received a number of requests from health boards for additional copies of this leaflet. It is also positive to note that the Welsh Government has set a target for wastage from untouched meals (**Recommendation 5**). The target which has been set is appropriate and in line with the recommendation in my report. The arrangements for monitoring compliance with the target also appear to be well defined. I should stress, however, that in relation to each of these recommendations, the Wales Audit Office has not undertaken audit work to verify whether the action taken by the Welsh Government is having an effect on the ground.

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While the overall response to the Committee's report is encouraging, I would draw the Committee's attention to a few specific areas where it may wish to seek further information and clarification from the Welsh Government. These are as follows:

- In its response to **Recommendation 3**, the Welsh Government states that it will require health bodies to place their action plans and progress updates on their websites. We are not aware that this is yet happening, and the Committee may therefore wish to ask the Welsh Government for information on how it intends to ensure that such documents are being made publicly available.
- In its response to **Recommendation 4**, the Welsh Government makes reference to the 'Hospital Nutrition and Catering Framework website' as a mechanism to facilitate awareness of Welsh Government guidance on hospital food. While this is a positive development, the Welsh Government will need to ensure that NHS bodies make appropriate use of the website, and the Committee could usefully ask the Welsh Government to indicate how it intends to monitor and review use of the website.
- The response to **Recommendation 4** also refers to the use of the Fundamentals of Care audit process as the prime mechanism for monitoring compliance with the *All Wales Nutritional Care Pathway* and the *All Wales Nutrition and Catering Standards for Food and Fluid Provision for Hospital Inpatients*. There are clear benefits to using the Fundamentals of Care audit as a mechanism to monitor compliance with these standards given that the audit processes are already embedded at the ward level. However, we do have some concerns as to whether the audit process will be sufficient to give the necessary assurances that all the standards are being met, for example those relating to the nutrient and calorie content of patient food. The Welsh Government's response also mentions that mechanisms are being explored to independently validate Fundamentals of Care audit outputs. This is important given that a significant element of the audit involves self-reporting of practices by ward managers. The Committee may therefore wish to seek further information from the Welsh Government on the methodology for Fundamentals of Care audits. The Committee may also wish to consider whether it would, in time, welcome an update from the Welsh Government on any firm proposals to independently validate the outputs from these audits.
- The Welsh Government's response to **Recommendation 6** indicates that the Minister for Health and Social Care has requested that NHS bodies display local authority food hygiene ratings where they can be seen easily by consumers. While the Ministerial letter represents a timely response to concerns raised by the Committee, members may wish to seek assurance from the Welsh Government that the food hygiene ratings are now being displayed as intended, including how such information is to be made visible to patients.

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In its response to **Recommendation 7**, the Welsh Government has made a commitment to ongoing monitoring of progress against my recommendations, and has indicated that a further update will be provided to the Committee by the end of May 2012, incorporating a plan to implement any outstanding issues. This is helpful and illustrative of the Welsh Government's desire to maintain a focus on hospital catering and patient nutrition. It is also pleasing to note the areas of progress highlighted against my previous recommendations, compared with the position reported to the Committee in November 2011. The Committee could ask the Welsh Government to ensure that its promised update includes reference to any further progress against the Committee's own recommendations, and that it addresses some of the outstanding questions I have set out in this letter.

I trust that the information provided above is helpful to the Committee.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Huw Vaughan Thomas', written in a cursive style.

HUW VAUGHAN THOMAS
AUDITOR GENERAL FOR WALES