

NATIONAL DISSEMINATION WORKSHOP

Food, older people and quality of life

Wednesday 26 October 2005 – National Heart & Lung Institute, London SW3

Challenges and Responses

The audience at the Dissemination Workshop were asked to contribute responses to the challenges posed on the four topics discussed at the conference – food shopping, food services, selecting and preparing meals and the role of meals. Below is a selection of suggestions received. It is recognised that some have already been actioned in some parts of the country. However, it is hoped that these lists can help stimulate all stakeholders to improve the services they offer.

Topic 1: Food shopping and the older consumer

1. How can food retailers provide more facilities that enhance our shopping experience?

- Designated 'happy hours' in supermarkets without making us feel alienated/excluded from the rest of society
- Pre-printed shopping lists in order of the store layout
- Some 'social development' services which enable older people to give something back to society, such as intergenerational schemes e.g. 'adopt a grandchild'
- Personal/volunteer shoppers (buddies) for those of us that need extra help or support
- More toilets
- More seating areas and leaning posts in-store especially in the larger supermarkets; trolleys with in built seats would help us when shopping
- Stronger carrier bags which are easy to open
- Newspapers in cafes, less sensory stimulation i.e. not so much noise!
- In-store post offices would be useful

2. How can food retailers encourage us to try new foods?

- More in-store cooking and tasting demonstrations with recipe cards for 'one or two' to take home
- More *vouchers* or free samples of products and generally more opportunities to buy food at reduced prices and to share in BOGOFs (because we can't afford to waste our money on products we might not like).
- Fact sheets with information relating to health and food targeted towards older customers i.e. importance of dietary fibre
- Chance to buy local farmers' produce
- Chance to share food shopping with others and to take part in 'new food days' with day centres and go on tours organised and run from supermarkets

3. How can we have improved access to stores and better delivery services?

- More shuttle buses / 'loop' bus services and designated best parking places
- Offer help with carrying food to car or bus.
- Offer delivery services after in-store shopping - and not just for internet shoppers
- Work with local schools or youth clubs for free delivery service
- Offer special loyalty card for older people for suitable benefits
- More emphasis on telephone shopping, being able to shop together online
- Mobile or home pick-ups for shopping trips

4. How can food retailers offer us more opportunities for social interaction in store?

- In-store training sessions to enable us to use internet shopping and self scanning equipment
- More cafes for a chance to sit down but cheaper with more variety of portion size
- Offer water/free refreshments while staff pack for us
- Provide facilities within the store for community groups to meet such as WI meetings
- More small shops and smaller supermarkets with local staff

5. How can food retailers help us with problems of bulky packaging?

- Provide a range of recycling facilities because we are keen to preserve the environment.
- Cashier points which always offer customers help with packing
- Less bulky packaging as it makes it easier for us to carry and store products and dispose of the packaging
- Make packaging biodegradable
- Provide handy tools to open and dispose of packaging in store

Topic 2: Food services for older people

1. How can users be surveyed more efficiently to identify popular meal choices and to highlight satisfaction with community meals?

- Users to be independently surveyed regularly to identify meal preferences and any problems with food provided
- Providers to review seating arrangements for dining to prevent newcomers feeling excluded from established groups
- Wastage from community meals should be regularly assessed to identify problems with particular foods
- Be proactive and establish reflective user groups to feed back complaints and suggestions. This could be linked to competitions among users for the best suggestions

2. How can providers be more innovative about the nature and range of food provided?

- Reasonably priced meals/snacks provided by local social centres open to everyone not just older people
- Congregate centres could offer 'take home' meals and snacks.
- Meals on wheel services could take a whole day approach to the provision of food
- More flexibility in day centre meals such as being able to order different menu options such as one course only
- Provide more tasting sessions and offer a wider range of main meals and vegetables, themed and ethnic meals such as Caribbean, Indian and Italian meals
- Offer discount days, trips to local restaurants
- More reasonably priced cafes near day centres to reduce the dependence aspect of lunch clubs at day centres

3. How can we get more information on the range of food services and who is eligible to receive them?

- Eligibility criteria used for referral systems for meals on wheels to be more consistent and transparent as well as regular reviews undertaken
- More accessible information on the range of food services eg meals on wheels and meals available in social centres
- Providers to advertise services more widely and not just on the internet sites for borough councils; wider dissemination in mass media regarding food services
- The economic benefits of ensuring good nutritional status of older people in the community to be appreciated by social services
- Information about food services provided at the post office and also in GP surgeries/pharmacies so we get information with pension/prescription

4. How can we get assessment of warning signals for 'at nutritional risk' people in the community to be used routinely by those involved in care service provision?

- Can the screening tool 'MUST' be more widely used in community settings?
- Can the standard GP 75+ screening be amended for these purposes?
- Implementation of buddy systems for older people who can detect emotional signs as well as physical signs of potential risk such as weight loss
- Ask clients to complete self-administered questionnaires to determine need; use checklists which are clear and accurate
- Make community carers more aware and use networks of others such as dentists, podiatrists, health visitors
- Once assessment in place, need ways to prioritise and switch resources to nutritionally 'at risk' people from health professionals and social services

5. How can service providers do more to implement the food service standards set by the NACC?

- Ensure that awareness of the National Association of Care Caterers guidelines is increased and provide incentives to use these standards.
- Link to performance/best practice reviews, regular audits

Topic 3: Selecting and preparing foods in later life

1. Can food manufacturers encourage us to eat healthy foods and to trust convenience food and ready meals more?

- Provide ordinary healthy foods, not specially labelled for any particular age group
- Positive advertising of fruit and vegetables
- More honesty in labels e.g. hidden salt
- Don't use terms like convenience food - prefer others such as quick and easy to prepare

2. Could manufacturers consider a scheme whereby people can buy smaller quantities and still benefit from cost savings?

- Scheme whereby people can split multi-packs and still benefit from cost saving e.g 8 packs of yoghurt
- Consider re-branding the smaller size packages aimed at children for us
- More refill schemes needed so that desired quantities bought
- Charge half price and not more than half price for half portions
- Pick and mix schemes to shop with buddy and share large packets
- Loyalty schemes for older people could include some of these ideas

3. What can be done about physical problems with ring pulls, plastic film and plastic milk tops?

- Get older people to 'road test' before put on market (HelpThe Aged do this)
- Persuade supermarkets to take lead on this as good for marketing themselves
- Use more returnable bottles with deposits
- Give away openers with purchase - some RNIB equipment can be adapted

4. What can be done to improve labelling and legibility on packaging and leaflets?

- Large labels on shelf near products
- Less 'noise' associated with packages
- Make it a legal requirement to have large print format of leaflets
- Provide free specs/large magnifying glasses/sheets on string
- Have information posts with large type using standardised information
- Provide a free phone care line for additional information

5. How can manufacturers make brand recognition easier for us?

- Remember that packaging changes can cause problems for some e.g. colour changes on labels may stop recognition of brand
- Transparent packaging for some food products – we want to see products we trust; we are often unsure of new developments
- Stop all the re-branding!

Topic 4: The role of meals in later life

1. How can we help people to realise and address the fact that life transitions can put them 'at nutritional risk' through changes to the way they experience food and meals?

- Realise that we are at our most vulnerable in transition stages of our life (being together to being alone; being healthy to being unhealthy) and that chronological age is irrelevant. Social changes are more important than physical changes.
- Health professionals to devise and use a screening tool/ a score based on transition/stability /dependency status which we know can influence our attitude to the role of meals
- Raise awareness of risk through the professions; health professionals; bereavement counsellors; local government, public information campaigns
- Raise awareness through churches/funeral services; TV adverts; storylines of soap operas;
- Make awareness standard part of retirement courses and grief counselling;
- Make it permissible for people to talk about difficulties at transition if they want to; encourage them to talk about food.

2. How can we cater for diverse wants and needs when it comes to meals?

- Have respect for us and our cultures
- Accept that ,as we get older, we can revert to childhood taste.
- Provide hard and soft meal choices to cover varying states of dentition
- Ensure user involvement in decisions about variety provided
- Learn lessons from menus/atmospheres in cafes/ gastro pubs

3. How can the enjoyment of food and meals be encouraged, especially for those living alone?

- Charities/adult education groups to organise leisure management courses. These should interest seniors in trips to farms, to factories, to different types of shops. (promotes social interaction as well as increase interest in food)
- Eat together courses and cooking courses (including microwave courses) for at risk groups and non cooks e.g. new widowers, pre-retirement men.
- Meetings at breakfast/lunch/supper which include a hobby/interest such as book club
- Courses for training seniors to be tutors to help others to appreciate the role of meals
- Community schemes with transport
- Use co-operative schemes to get more fresh produce to older people - fresh fruit and vegetables rounds?
- Encourage families to 'Adopt older people'; encourage cross-generational links so that teenagers learn from older people and vice versa.

4. How can variety be encouraged in older people's meals, especially for those living alone?

- Encourage various community groups to have speakers/demonstrations on this topic

- Give demonstrations; encourage us to join community schemes
- Manufacturers to provide cost reduced foods - to describe foods honestly, not to include unknown ingredients and to sell variety packs
- Celebrity chef to write a simple cookbook for one

5. How can the resources available to older people to achieve their goals in relation to food and meals be increased?

- Better representation in government eg food ombudsman for older people. Role to lobby for better policies; raise awareness in local government.
- Advocacy groups or senior mentors across the board to ensure that older people feel empowered to complain or at least provide accurate and honest feedback on services.