FOOD AND NUTRITION IN CHILDCARE SETTINGS

Consultation by the Welsh Government

Response from BMA Cymru Wales

17 September 2018

INTRODUCTION

BMA Cymru Wales is pleased to provide a response to the consultation by the Welsh Government on its proposed best practice guidance for food and nutrition in childcare settings in Wales.

The BMA is a professional association and trade union representing and negotiating on behalf of all doctors and medical students in the UK. It is a leading voice advocating for outstanding health care and a healthy population. It is an association providing members with excellent individual services and support throughout their lives.

RESPONSE

BMA Cymru Wales welcomes the opportunity to respond to this consultation. Our response to the following questions posed within the consultation document is as follows:

Q1. Do you agree that up to date nutrition standards and guidance are helpful to have in place?

We would certainly agree with the importance of this guidance. As a nation, we are facing an obesity epidemic which in turn has resulted in poor health amongst those affected by it. Latest statistics from the National Survey for Wales, show that 60% of the adult population in Wales were overweight or obese in 2017-18, with 22% being obese.¹ In terms of children, the latest figures from the Child Measurement Programme for Wales show that 27.1% of 4-5 year olds were found to be overweight or obese in 2016-17, with 12.4% being found to be obese.² These figures alone underline the need for action.

² http://www.wales.nhs.uk/sitesplus/888/page/67795

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Furthermore, it is well documented that poor diet and being overweight or obese can lead to a range of health problems, such as an increased likelihood of cancer, diabetes, cardiovascular issues and poor oral health, as well as the psychological repercussions. This is turn is putting huge strain on health service provision.

The best way to cure these health issues is through the prevention of obesity in the first place. We would suggest that a key way to prevent obesity in later age is good nutrition, and good education about nutrition, from a young age.

However, as we previously indicated when responding to the Public Health (Wales) Act 2017 during its passage through the Assembly, 3 we would have much preferred to see guidance such as this being brought forward on a statutory basis so that it would have the force of law. The effectiveness of this guidance will depend on the extent to which it is implemented.

It will remain to be seen to what extent service providers, including those from the independent sector, will adhere to it given that it is only being published in an advisory capacity. We would therefore suggest that once the guidance is agreed it is important to ensure that sufficient effort is then undertaken to maximise the extent to which it is followed by childcare providers.

Q2. How do you feel about the layout of the sections, are they easy to read and follow?

Our assessment is that the layout of the document is good. It has been written in a manner that is easy to follow, and the use of diagrams and figures mean that the information is presented in an informative and sufficiently engaging manner.

Q3. What would help to ensure these are easily accessible to you?

We would suggest that making it possible to click through individual sections when viewing it via the web would be beneficial for childcare providers. An easy index menu could also be provided to make it easier to skip directly to particular sections. It is also important that the document is sufficiently printer-friendly.

Q4. Thinking about each of the sections, do you feel there are:
   a. any particular sections of information in the document which you disagree about?
   b. any gaps in information which you think should be included?
   c. any parts that are particularly helpful?

   a. We suggest that the “balancing requirements” table (Table 1) might be made more eye-catching. This is an area that many people may not sufficiently understand, and we feel it is important to ensure that it is not overlooked.
   b. None that we have identified.
   c. We feel that the portion size section is good, as well as the way that that recipes are shown. Consideration could however be given to splitting the way the recipes are presented into sections as is often the case in recipe books e.g. snacks, pasta dishes, poultry dishes, pork dishes, lamb/beef dishes, vegetarian/vegan, desserts etc. When presented online, it could also be useful to provide a filter mechanism to make it easier to skip to specific recipes within a particular section. This could be similar to the way such a feature is often used on websites for clothing retailers, where you can filter results to show only those available in a certain size or colour. In the same way, recipes could be presented so the reader could filter out those suitable for a specific diet (e.g. lactose free), or for those containing a specific food group (e.g. pulses).

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Q5. Do you feel there are any particular issues or barriers which could prevent the successful implementation of the nutritional guidelines?

We do have some concerns about the length of the document. People might skim read it as a result and miss out on some of the important information it contains. One way this might be overcome could be by highlighting information judged to be more important within the introduction, as well as by making it easier for readers to skip through the different sections in the document to those bits which may be more important.

We would also suggest that effort will also have to be undertaken to combating a potential lack of motivation from providers, particularly in the light of the concerns we have already expressed that the guidance has not been made statutory. Continuing to push this initiative will be vital to assist in encouraging engagement and motivation. Education of children themselves, should also be seen as key.

Q6. What kind of training, support or resource would you like to see to help support the successful implementation of the standards?

We consider that an appropriate information and education campaign will be vital to the success of this guidance. Ways to make this accessible and engaging could also be considered. For instance, use of an interactive online quiz could assist in encouraging the involvement of both children and childcare providers. An approach which provides appropriate acknowledgement of those who do well in implementing the guidance might assist in subsequently persuading others to use it.

Q7. Do you think this guidance will help to improve food provision in childcare settings?

As we have previously indicated, the extent to which the guidance is successful in delivering such an improvement will be dependent on the extent to which it is implemented by providers of childcare. Sufficient effort will therefore need to be given to encouraging the guidance to be followed. As we have already alluded to, we feel that the likelihood of the guidance achieving the level of improvement intended could be improved by it being made statutory. This should certainly therefore be considered in future, if it is felt after a period of the review that the guidance has failed to make sufficient impact. We therefore feel this is an aspect to which the Welsh Government should apply a watching brief.

We have asked a number of specific question. If you have any related issues which we have not specifically addressed, please use this space to report them:

There are places where the document may need to be more effectively proof-read. For instance, we observe that the speech bubble on page 11 of Volume 1 is too small leading to some of the text within it being cut off. Another suggestion is that the sections marked as “practice points” could be designed in a way which helps them to stand out a little better.