

Doctors' opinions on the quality and availability of hospital food for patients, doctors and visitors



The BMA conducted a survey of its research panel of doctors across the UK in May and June 2019, to gain their insight into hospital food available for patients, staff and visitors. The results suggest that the hospital food environment is not a particularly healthy one, with doctors indicating that they do not believe the food served to inpatients, the food available to doctors in staff canteens, or the food available for purchase by patients, staff and visitors in hospital concourses, promotes a healthy balanced diet. There is also a lack of variety and choice. During night shifts doctors are particularly badly served, with the only food available to purchase often being unhealthy products from vending machines.

In the 2015 BMA report [Food for Thought](#), we highlighted the variability in the quality of food provided in hospitals, and voiced concern over the food available to purchase in hospitals. We called for comprehensive, consistent and mandatory hospital food standards to be implemented across the UK, and for the sale of unhealthy food and drink to be phased out in hospital sites. The results below suggest that there is still much work to be done for the food environment in hospitals to be considered healthy.

Food available to patients

The doctors surveyed were more likely to disagree than agree that the food served to inpatients promoted a healthy balanced diet, and also generally disagreed that there was an adequate variety and choice of food served to inpatients.

Respondents were asked to recall a specific time when they thought the food being served to patients was inadequate. Common responses to this question included concerns that food was not suitable for specific dietary requirements – e.g. for coeliac patients or patients with inflammatory bowel disease – and that food was unappealing and not nutritional. Responses also noted that food was often made off-site, negatively affecting the quality by the time it had reached the hospital.

Food on hospital concourses

The majority of respondents disagreed that the food in hospital concourses – where food and drink is available for patients, staff and visitors to buy – promotes a healthy balanced diet, and the majority disagreed that there was adequate choice and variety of food in concourses. The doctors surveyed were more likely to agree than disagree that enough information was provided (for example on packaging or menus) to allow patients, visitors and staff eating in hospital concourses to make healthy choices.

Food available to doctors

Those surveyed were more likely to agree than disagree that the food available to them in staff canteens promoted a healthy balanced diet. During night shifts doctors appear to be particularly badly provided for. 65% of respondents said that they had nowhere to buy food from other than vending machines during night shifts. Although 88% of respondents did have vending machines in their hospitals, the majority of respondents disagreed that these machines helped promote a healthy balanced diet or provided adequate variety and choice.

Results breakdown

Thinking about where you work, please state whether you agree or disagree with the following statements about patient food:

	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know	Total
Where you work, the food served to inpatients promotes a healthy balanced diet	5.62% (19)	21.53% (73)	15.93% (54)	20.35% (69)	15.34% (52)	21.24% (72)	339
Inpatients have an adequate choice and variety of food served to them	5.59% (19)	20.59% (70)	16.47% (56)	19.41% (66)	16.18% (55)	21.76% (74)	340

Thinking about where you work, please state whether you agree or disagree with the following statements about food in concourses – food available to purchase by patients, visitors and staff on hospital premises:

	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know	Total
The food available for patients, visitors and staff to buy in hospital concourses promotes a healthy balanced diet	2.82% (10)	24.58% (87)	17.8% (63)	26.84% (95)	24% (85)	4% (14)	354
There is adequate choice and variety of food available for patients, visitors and staff in hospital concourses	5.62% (20)	28.1% (100)	12.64% (45)	25.% (89)	25.56% (91)	3.1% (11)	356
Enough information is provided (e.g. on packaging or menus) to allow patients, visitors and staff to make healthy choices	4.52% (16)	27.12% (96)	18.93% (67)	20.34% (72)	20.62% (73)	8.47% (30)	354

Thinking about where you work, please state whether you agree or disagree with the following statements about staff canteens:

	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know	Total
The food provided for staff promotes a healthy balanced diet	5.41% (18)	26.73% (89)	17.72% (59)	24.02% (80)	18.32% (61)	7.81% (26)	333
The food provided for staff has adequate variety so that healthy choices can be made	6.91% (23)	30.33% (101)	15.92% (53)	20.72% (69)	18.92% (63)	7.21% (24)	333

Where you work, is there food available for staff to buy during night shifts (other than from vending machines)?

Yes	7.86% (29)
No	64.77% (239)
Not sure	27.37% (101)

Are there vending machines in your hospital?

Yes	88.32% (325)
No	11.68% (43)

Thinking about where you work, please state whether you agree or disagree with the following statements about food in vending machines:

	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know	Total
The food provided in vending machines promotes a healthy balanced diet	0.00% (0)	6.21% (20)	9% (29)	23.6% (74)	48.45% (156)	13.35% (43)	322
The food provided in vending machines has adequate variety so that healthy choices can be made	0.93% (3)	7.45% (24)	8.7% (28)	21.74% (70)	48.14% (155)	13.04% (42)	322

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British Medical Association, BMA House,
Tavistock Square, London WC1H 9JP
bma.org.uk

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