

## ARE THE 'GUIDELINES FOR NUTRITIONAL CARE AND FOOD SERVICE IN NURSING HOMES' BEING IMPLEMENTED?

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Guidelines for the nutritional care and food service in nursing homes were developed in 1984 by the Nutrition Section of the then Commonwealth Department of Health and endorsed by NH&MRC. Nursing homes were 'urged to use the Guidelines when planning menus' (Commonwealth/State Working Party on Nursing Home Standards, 1987). The Guidelines were established to improve the nutritional status of nursing home residents since several studies have shown that the nutrient intake of some nursing home residents may be unsatisfactory (Zador 1988). The aim of this study was to determine to what extent the Guidelines were being implemented in the Central Sydney Health Services area.

The directors of 24 nursing homes with more than 60 beds were approached to participate in the survey. The survey involved reviewing the menus, observing food preparation procedures and recording plate wastage. A questionnaire and check list were designed to determine the extent to which the Guidelines have been implemented as they are difficult to assess. Other issues, such as texture modified diets and feeding technique, were investigated.

Thirteen nursing homes with an average number of 90 beds agreed (63%) to take part, of which only 7 were aware of the existence of the Guidelines. All nursing homes visited complied with the recommendation in the Guidelines that menu cycles be of no less than three weeks and the minimum daily serves of the four major food groups were generally met. Recommendations in the Guidelines that were not implemented to a limited extent include: (a) Incorporating the 'Dietary Guidelines for Australians' into the menu, (b) the provision of vitamin D supplements or adequate exposure to sunlight, (c) monitoring body weight on a weekly basis, (d) determining food preferences of residents and providing choice at each meal, (e) providing lunch and dinner at the recommended times and (f) the use of a dietitian to plan menus, and plan and implement diet regimes and counsel residents where special diets are necessary for therapeutic reasons.

Twenty eight % of nursing home residents (range 11-47%) were receiving texture modified diets for various reasons. Twelve % of residents (range 7 - 17%) were on diabetic diets; the only 'special diets' provided. Plate wastage was least at breakfast, followed by the evening meal and lunch. Eleven % of residents (range 0 - 44%) were taking energy supplements which included 'Sustagen', 'Ensure' or egg flips. Fifty four % of residents (range 0 - 100%) were taking fibre supplements which included adding bran and/or prunes to breakfast cereal.

We would like to suggest that the Guidelines might be revised to include recommendations on the use of texture modified diets. The implementation of the Guidelines should be easier to assess. For example, the recommendation that, 'nursing homes are required to have appropriate weighing equipment' would be easier to assess than the current recommendation that 'residents should be weighed at weekly intervals'. The recommended milk intake of 300 ml per day should be increased to 600 ml, in the Guidelines, to be consistent with the increased Recommended Dietary Intake for Calcium in post-menopausal women. The revised Guidelines then need to be promoted and implemented.

### COMMONWEALTH/STATE WORKING PARTY ON NURSING HOMES STANDARDS

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