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Making vegan food more accessible
NHS Supply Chain: Food’s inhouse dietitian describes why veganism is more prevalent in the NHS than ever.

A guide to food waste management
How to reduce your food waste in line with the hospital food review’s findings.
Through the Looking Glass...

Rosemarie Hoyle, Divisional Manager, Healthcare for leading meals provider, apetito, takes a look at the year ahead...

“If we all took one thing away from the 2020 Hospital Food Review, it would be that ‘one size (or rather solution), does not fit all’.

Great hospital food is about so much more than the catering system used. Whether prepared meals or those cooked on site, all types of catering system can deliver high quality results, but ONLY if the other factors are in place to support that across people, service, technology, and sustainability.

Yet where does this leave us under COVID, which has undoubtedly contributed towards making those other factors increasingly hard to accommodate? As the pandemic puts intolerable pressure and strain on the NHS, catering provision remains critically important to ensure patients – and staff – receive meals and the nutrition their bodies need to help them recover, or to work. Ensuring nutritious food is available 24 hours a day is paramount, and increasingly, we are seeing complete meal solutions, such as our CarteChoix range, growing in importance and relevance.

COVID means hospital catering remains a challenge for all stakeholders. We know from our experience that elements such as on-site training and service support have been replaced by remote platforms, contactless deliveries implemented to ensure protection and safety for all concerned. Staffing resources within hospital teams are challenged by absence due to illness or the need to self-isolate for their own (or their family’s) protection. Food safety is non-negotiable and that means robust processes are rigorously in play with suppliers, wholesalers, and catering partners.

At apetito we continue to approach the months ahead with 100% commitment to maintain and grow our service further to help our Healthcare customers over the most challenging time the NHS has ever seen.

This support extends to a commitment to ensure our meals are produced to the highest sustainability and environmental standards. In particular, waste reduction alongside the growing movement for ‘waste not, want not’ that remains at the forefront of the hospital catering debate.

We are one of a small number of companies that have signed the ‘Step Up to the Plate’ pledge – a ground-breaking initiative to drive down food waste and means we are partnering with customers to help them minimise waste at the point of service – also helping their budgets as throwing away food clearly has a cost attached to it.

For many years, we have sent zero food waste to landfill and we have also signed up to the UK Plastics Pact to keep plastic out of the ocean, pledging to reach a series of ambitious targets by 2025. This includes the elimination of unnecessary single-use plastic packaging, through redesign, innovation, or alternative delivery method.

Together we are stronger’ and in the months’ ahead we all have a role to play in ensuring our Healthcare customers have one less thing to worry about... Great food, great nutrition, and service excellence, enabling our NHS to focus its energies and efforts where it is most needed – the front-line services.
Chairman’s Column

I have been hearing so many people talking about another Groundhog Day, and it is easy to fall into the trap and believe this to be true. Since the first lockdown, our lives have changed considerably, but for those working on the frontline of this pandemic, life is nothing like a Groundhog Day.

I continue to hear stories about how the support teams, including the caterers, are standing beside their clinical colleagues and working throughout this crisis, so I would like to publicly say a big thank you to all our members who have been at the forefront of keeping the patients and the NHS nourished.

Of course, almost in the background, the New Year chimes of Big Ben brought in a new era with the United Kingdom leaving the European Union. Many of us have spent a couple of years planning for every scenario, and with the various stops and starts it felt like we were living through a soap opera. However, something that has kept me going has been the unflinching support we have received from our suppliers, not only for our essential foodstuffs but for our equipment and materials. Without exception, they have made the NHS their top priority and without this support we would have struggled. We have got through it together and, as I write, I am hearing that our supply lines have survived the changeover and that food is continuing to arrive through the channel ports.

Moving forward

With the great news that a vaccination programme is finally underway, we should be able to, firstly, take a bit of a respite but then start to think about moving forward and trying to return to some kind of normality. I sincerely hope this will mean getting back to some face-to-face meetings.

As an Association, we have already taken the decision to push back our Leadership & Development Forum until 25–27 October. This has proved to be a wise decision in view of the latest developments with the pandemic and I would like to thank Carol Delves, and the 2021/21 Forum Team for their efforts in securing this amendment. So let us look forward to getting together again. The change has meant that the Forum will be at the beginning of the week, but this is not unusual because we have had to accommodate this on at least two other occasions when circumstances conspired against us.

Recruitment drive

One of the things that cannot wait until the autumn is our response to the Hospital Food Review, and I hope that everyone has now had time to read and fully understand the report.

There are a number of key recommendations included, not least that every hospital should have representation with the Hospital Caterers Association. As a result, a major recruitment drive is underway and I would ask you all to look around you and engage with those hospital caterers who are still not signed up.

Another way that I would like your help is in the encouragement to get others interested in a career in healthcare, and there is much more about this on page 20 of this issue. We all know what a rewarding job we have, helping patients’ recover and sustaining our colleagues, and we can offer so much more to those who are just starting out in their careers.

I would like to publicly say a big thank you to all our members who have been at the forefront of keeping the patients and the NHS going.

One of the key recommendations of the report calls for an NHS catering apprenticeship scheme and a nationally recognised certificated course for hospital caterers. To achieve this aim, we will need to engage with our local colleges and schools if we are to get our message across. Starting out on your career is daunting enough in normal times but with the hospitality industry on its knees at the moment, now is the time for us to convince others that we have something special to offer.

Let us all look forward to the spring and hopefully a much brighter 2021.

Craig Smith, Honorary National Chairman,
Hospital Caterers Association
East of Scotland Branch

From Loraine Hartley

The Branch continues to hold its committee meetings in the virtual world – via Teams – and although it is a great way to keep in touch, it is not the same as meeting up.

The Branch held its AGM on Friday 4 December 2020, and we were pleased to welcome our National Chairman, Craig Smith. Craig updated members about the changes and proposals to the Association’s governance arrangements, the impact of Coronavirus on the HCA, and his role as Chair.

The AGM also saw the appointment of our new Chair, Sean Hunter, and our new committee member Tara Hargreaves – good luck to you both.

We are now planning our 2021 events and meetings calendar, which will hopefully go ahead and allow us to meet up with retired members who we have not seen or heard from in a while, and to start our recruitment campaign. The rollout of the vaccines will hopefully ease the situation, so fingers crossed.

The Branch wishes everyone a happy, healthy and ambitious 2021.

My Life in Retirement

East of Scotland Branch, like the rest of the HCA, saw so many plans and ambitions put aside last year, so we asked a few of our retired members to share with us what they have been doing since retirement and through COVID. The spotlight this issue falls on John Walker and Muriel Blake.

John Walker (Formerly of Burlodge Ltd.)

I began work in 1965 as a hotel Commis Chef before joining The Army Catering Corps in 1968. I served a total of 23 years, completing my military contract in 1991. I was then employed by the NHS as an Assistant Hotel Services Manager at Murray Royal Hospital in Perth before moving to Perth Royal Infirmary as Hotel Services Manager in 1993. I left the Health Service in 1995 to take up a position as Regional Sales Manager in 1993. I left the Health Service in 1995 to take up a position as Regional Sales Manager with Burlodge Ltd and my sales areas of responsibility were Scotland, North East England, Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. I retired from Burlodge in 2017 after 22 years, wondering how I was ever going to cope with not working following 52 years of full-time employment.

I have often heard retired people say that there are not enough hours in a day to do what they want and that they don’t know how they ever managed to find time to work. When I heard this I thought they must be joking – you can sit around all day doing nothing if you want. Not a chance. I can honestly say now that there are not enough hours, in any day, to do what I would like to do.

My wife was still working when I retired so I went straight into the role of house-husband and was fully employed in domestic life from the moment she left work until she came home to a cooked meal (I did manage to squeeze in a trip to the gym Monday to Friday).

After two years of this hard labour a friend asked if I was interested in driving, part-time, for a care home in Kirkcaldy, delivering meals to old people (well, older than me). My role involves standing in for permanent driving staff who are on holiday or sick leave and I thoroughly enjoy all aspects of this job, especially meeting and chatting to our clients.

My priorities have definitely changed and life is much less stressful. I no longer have to get up at silly o’clock in the morning to travel to Dublin, Belfast, Newcastle Upon Tyne or Inverness for a 9am appointment, but I certainly don’t sit about either (other than when the cricket/golf/rugby/football is on the television of course). I also no longer have to worry about working as a full-time house-husband because my wife has now joined me in retirement and we now share those household chores (joy).

Therefore, in my opinion, there is no such thing as life in the retirement slow lane, but it is pressure free and I love it.

I wish you all the very best for the future and a long and happy retirement when your turn comes.

Muriel Blake

When I was asked to return to work in early 2020 - after three years of retirement – to assist the catering department in Victoria Hospital, it was a daunting prospect.

The Catering Manager had left and two long-standing members of staff had passed away suddenly, so morale was at a low. I was going on holiday in the middle of April so I agreed to return for a few weeks, but COVID-19 happened and I ended up working until the end of August.

The department required support to maintain its normal high standards, to help improve morale and to recruit additional staff, although interviews and recruitment were a challenge given the COVID restrictions. I had to dig deep into the recently unused part of my brain to remember regulations and procedures, and had to undergo a steep learning curve because there were a number of new recruitment procedures and IT packages I needed to use that were not in place before my retirement.

Staff had to learn new routines when they went to the wards and additional procedures to ensure the safety of the staff, patients and food. Everyone responded extremely well and rose to the new challenges, although, as expected, they were nervous about what would happen and how safe they would be in going to the wards. However, once they became familiar with procedures they carried on as usual.

The improved staffing levels and the fantastic attendance and good spirit of the staff returned, and although it took much longer than we had hoped to recruit a new manager there is now a new leader in place to take the department forward.

It was my pleasure and privilege to return to the department and I commend all the staff for their dedication, good spirits and hard work during this most difficult time.
Wessex Branch

From Adrian Domagala

Happy New Year to everyone from the Wessex Branch and let’s hope that 2021 ends better than 2020 now we have the vaccine roll out.

Our AGM and Branch meeting were again held on Zoom. This is proving a very popular alternative to the ‘old style face-to-face’ meetings in some ways, with a few members able to drop in even for a short time if they can’t make the whole meeting.

It’s great that we are able to meet this way every month thanks to technology and, of course, we were delighted to welcome both Craig Smith and Janice Gillan to our meeting once again.

Last year taught me many things including kindness, compassion and gratitude. I am truly humbled by the work of all NHS staff, having experienced an unexpected two-night stay at Derriford Hospital in Plymouth just before Christmas. When you are there and see what goes on, I have nothing but admiration to everyone – you/they do a great job in the face of adversity and my heartfelt thanks to you all.

The other thing that 2020 has taught me is to remember to mute/unmute – it’s so simple but how often do we say “you’re on mute.”

South West Branch

From Anna Warman

The Branch would like to congratulate Jane Wills on her new role as Deputy Facilities Manager – Community for Somerset NHS FT. Jane provides facilities services management across the trust, primarily supporting myself, Anna Warman, as the facilities manager for the community.

Jane started work with the NHS as a Diet Chef at Yeovil District Hospital and within six months was offered promotion to Head Chef at South Petherton Hospital. She held this position from 1989, moving to Crewkerne Hospital in 2009 for 18 months – in the same role – during the rebuild of South Petherton Hospital. Since 2011, Jane has worked as Hotel Services Supervisor at South Petherton Hospital, managing the catering, portering and housekeeping departments, and a team of more than 30 colleagues. Her role has developed over time to incorporate food hygiene training for the community and mental health sites, and to support our facilities leads.

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PREVENTING A LISTERIOSIS OUTBREAK

With listeria control still high on the agenda following last year’s outbreak, food safety expert STS has produced a ‘pictogram’ that can be displayed in catering areas for staff reference, providing a quick, visual reminder of key controls in preventing a listeriosis outbreak.

The pictogram can be printed from the HCA website at www.hospitalcaterers.org/news-events/news/t-update-from-sts

PUBLIC SECTOR CATERING

Public sector catering’s top 20 people announced

The Top 20 ‘most influential’ people involved in public sector catering during 2020 was announced on 10 December by Public Sector Catering magazine. The list represents those who go above and beyond to support the public sector catering industry, and will be part of a conversation throughout 2021 that will confront the issues facing the sector and explore collaboration in taking action.

The full 2020 list, which includes HCA members, is:

Alexia Robinson, Founder of Love British Food
Andy Jones, Chair of PSC100 Group
Andy Kemp, public sector ‘champion’, Bidfood
Anna Taylor, Director of Food Foundation
Clive Dunlop, Defence Logistics
Craig Smith, Chair of HCA
David Oliver, Head of Catering HMPS
Henry Dimbleby, Independent Lead, National Food Strategy
Jayne Jones, Chair of ASSIST FM
Kath Dalmeny, Head of food & farming charity Sustain
Lindsay Graham, Poverty & Inequality Commissioner, Scotland
Mark Davies, MD ISS Food Services
Molly Shafer, Chair of PACE
Phil Rees-Jones, Chair of TUCA
Phil Shelley, Chair of Hospital Food Review
Prue Leith, Ambassador Hospital Food Review
Sean Haley, Chair Sodexo UK & Ireland
Stephen Forster, Chair of LACA
Stuart Roberts, Deputy President NFU
Sue Cawthry, Chair of NACC

ButterflyCup is a British first

The ButterflyCup has become Britain’s first fully plastic-free and recyclable lid-free takeaway cup. The cup was created after TV chef Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall challenged major coffee chains to switch to a properly recyclable cup. Brits throw away an estimated 2.5 billion coffee cups a year, while only one in 400 cups gets recycled. If each of the 2.5 billion cups were placed on top of each other, it would create a stack long enough to stretch around the entire world.

The ButterflyCup can be recycled in a regular paper bin, composted at home, or placed in your food waste bin. Tommy McLoughlin, founder and chief executive of ButterflyCup, said, “We believe it is the world’s most environmentally friendly disposable cup, and we hope more coffee outlets across the UK give their customers the option of using it in the near future.”

Calls for PM to encourage public sector to buy British

As the UK continues to deal with the economic impact of the pandemic, Love British Food has written to Boris Johnson asking him to support local producers. The public sector purchases £2.6 billion of food every year, but Love British Food wants the Government to spend 85 per cent of this current public sector budget for procuring food and catering services with local producers and British businesses.

The letter, which was signed by leading figures in public sector catering including Craig Smith, National Chairman of the Hospital Caterers Association and Andy Jones, Chair, Public Sector Catering 100 Group, states: “What unites so many of us is our passion for supporting the dedicated and talented local farmers and producers who have kept this country running during some of its darkest hours. In a world full of uncertainty, having a stable supply of food and drink produced on these islands has never been more important. Others have rightly taken immense credit for their heroic actions this year, but it would be wrong to underestimate the important role that the British food and farming industry has played.”

Love British Food

E-learning Course!
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ButterflyCup

to encourage
public sector
to buy British

Calls for PM

High-risk foods, such as meat and chicken, should be handled to every meticulousness. However, reduce risk덕분에 following your recommendations.

Do not allow chilled food temperatures to be lower than 5°C.

Labetamol/ampicillin should not be refrigerated if it’s compared to STS.

Use chilled food advice to staff as a lanyard. Keep daily in the temperature.

A LISTERIOSIS OUTBREAK

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Love British Food

E-learning Course!
Check out our
**apetito launches new plant-based dishes**

Leading hospital meals provider, apetito, has launched eight new plant-based dishes as part of its innovative ‘Culinary Inspirations’ series. This vibrant collection of dishes includes a warming Thai Red Curry, creamy Butternut Squash Risotto, and an exotic BBQ Mexican Bean and Jackfruit dish.

Rosemarie Hoyle, apetito Divisional Manager – Healthcare, comments, “We know there is a rapidly growing need for more variety in vegetarian and vegan dishes, so we have developed these eight new dishes to add fresh inspiration to our range. Our aim is to enable hospitals to offer an enhanced choice in dishes while delivering exceptional nutrition for patients.”

apetito works in partnership with hospitals to serve great tasting nutritious food that represents value and best practice, supporting diverse patient needs with differing dietary and medical requirements.

For more information on Culinary Inspirations, check out www.apetito.co.uk/hospital-meal-services or contact 01225 560 136.

**Hospital Catering Award for West Suffolk Hospital**

Congratulations to West Suffolk Hospital, who won the Hospital Catering Award in the 2020 Health Business Awards in recognition of its catering team going above and beyond to provide arrangements for overnight staff, as well as the introduction of an ‘afternoon tea’ service as a special culinary treat for inpatients.

The nomination also highlighted that staff, visitors and patients are served the same food and that staff working overnight have access to hot meals via microwaves and vending machines.

The award comes on the back of the quality of the hospital’s food being highlighted in the Hospital Food Review. The hospital’s food is mentioned as one of just two dozen best practice sites nationally.

**New guide helps caterers profit from plant-based foods**

Country Range Group has launched a new guide for customers and chefs that features a host of recipes for plant-based dishes. The topics covered in the guide include the key driving forces behind the popularity of plant-based food, the impact of the trend on the education, hospitality and care sectors, and how to utilise ingredients such as sea vegetables within menus.

Research from Kantar Insights has shown that 93 per cent of plant-based meals are eaten by non-vegans and there are approximately 22 million people who now identify as ‘flexitarian’. Emma Holden, Marketing Controller at the Country Range Group, said, “Whether it’s the care, education or hospitality sectors, it’s vital that foodservice caterers are proactive and adapt their menus to suit the changing demands of their customers. The guide is packed full of key information about how caterers can seize the commercial plant-based opportunity, with plenty of top tips and recipe inspiration.”

**New catering services launched at Ashford & St Peter’s Hospitals**

Ashford & St Peters Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust has unveiled new staff and visitor catering services as part of a move to offer long-term food solutions across its Chertsey and Ashford sites in Middlesex.

The services, which include a staff restaurant and three cafés, provide staff and visitors with access to safe, modern and commercially viable areas to rest and refuel across the Trust’s two hospitals.

With more than 90 per cent of the food being freshly produced onsite, the Trust is in line to quickly meet requirements set out in the recently published Hospital Food Review. The new services will incorporate the surrounding community by working with local businesses to source produce where possible.

**Reduce Plastic Waste in Your Kitchen**

Major’s range of stocks and gravies not only provide support to make a big difference to menus but also provide innovative solutions in lowering plastic waste within your kitchen. According to Geoff Moyle, NHS Trust Catering Manager, “The beauty of Majors’ range is that it ticks all the right boxes. It offers great flavour and approved suitability claims, and when supplied in 20kg sacks with free reusable and recyclable storage containers, it cuts down considerably on the amount of plastic we have to recycle.”

Ian King, Major National Account Manager, adds, “We are fully behind the NHS Single-Use Plastics Reduction Campaign and are already working to reduce single-use and unavoidable plastic waste within our business. By moving from pots into sacks, it’s better for the environment but also better on your budget.”

To discover how Major can help you, contact ian.king.ik1@givaudan.com or visit www.majorint.com
As I write this article in mid-January, there is talk about lockdown hopefully ending at the beginning of March as a result of the successful rollout of the vaccination programme. As we said our ‘good riddance’ to 2020, 2021 came in not with the usual fireworks but with a set of rules and regulations that disappointed us all.

From my 40 years working in the NHS, January is normally the worst month of the year and this year it certainly is. Each day we get up and go to work not knowing what we are going to face or whether we are going to be able to achieve the tasks asked of us all. Then, at the end of the day when, quite often, additional unpaid hours have been worked and we are not sure if we have achieved all that we should, we go home to eat and go to bed and start the same thing all over again the next day. Resilience is a word I have said to myself every day for the last two months when I get out of bed each morning and this is what resilience is.

The decisions we are making are more about patient safety than about providing a quality service. Getting meals to the patients three times a day is our primary goal but with a depleted workforce, this is becoming more and more of a challenge when weighing up staff safety. Unwell or shielding staff are at home, and all other members of our catering teams are risk assessed, with adjustments put into place to eliminate placing them at risk.

Making the day-to-day decision about which member of staff you are going to rotate to serve patient meals on the COVID-positive wards feels like you are taking someone’s life in your hands. Within the kitchens, catering staff are wearing face masks for their full 7.5-hour shift in a confined, hot space, which is extremely dilapidating, so additional breaks are essential to ensure hydration.

As caterers, we step up to the mark, stand tall, and do everything that is asked of us and much, much more besides, and that is why I am proud to be a hospital caterer. I am proud of each and every member of the Hospital Catering Association as we continue to work towards getting back to normal. And, hopefully, what will be normal will be meeting up at the Leadership and Development Forum, which is now being held from 25–27 October in Liverpool. I look forward to seeing old friends and new members and discussing what life is like hopefully post-COVID.

Amanda Cartmill can be contacted at editor@hospitalcaterers.org
My COVID year so far

Lockdown, hand sanitiser, social distancing, facemasks, and PPE. These words will stick with us forever and remind us of the strange and frightening time we continue to live through. Whether we will be able to completely return to our usual way of living once the whole population has been vaccinated is unknown but, for now, we continue as we were in 2020: living and working in a very different way. Five HCA members describe what they did to adapt their hospitals to the COVID-way of operating.

Karen McLaughlin
Interim General Manager Community Catering/Domestic Services NHSCT, Northern Ireland

Our first priority was to ensure social distancing, allocating specific ‘workstations’ to the catering staff, which reduced the need to move around the kitchen area. Everyone was also required to wear facemasks.

In our dining rooms, we removed a lot of the tables and chairs to ensure the two metre social distancing requirements. We also placed stickers on the floor that requested that chairs and tables were not moved from their designated area. By doing this, staff could easily tell if anyone had moved them and request that they were returned to their position.

We also put up signage to say how many people could be in an area at any one time and that they needed to adhere to the two metre distancing. This was accompanied by additional hand sanitising stations. We are now employing a person to ‘police’ the social distancing and mask wearing.
Throughout the pandemic, our food and equipment catering suppliers have been amazing.

Tracy Litt
Catering Manager, University Hospitals of Morecambe Bay Trust Foundation Trust (UHMBT)

UHMBT comprises three sites – Barrow, Lancaster and Kendal – and each obviously had to implement various measures to keep staff and patients safe.

Our restaurants became staff-only facilities, with seating re-arranged and sanitation increased to provide a safe area for staff to enjoy their meals. One of the restaurants was actually refurbished to ensure social distancing could be maintained throughout. Protective shields were fitted along the service counters and it was compulsory for catering staff to wear facemasks.

We continued with a full meal service for staff in the restaurants. All food was provided at half price and staff were asked to pay by card, where possible, to reduce the handling of cash.

To reduce the footfall of staff within the catering department, and therefore ensure social distancing was adhered to, the team was divided into two and worked an AM and PM shift. We did see a reduction in staffing levels because of those either self-isolating, shielding, or actually having the virus, but throughout these challenges our full service has continued.

It was very important that we continued our ward service, so catering staff served patient meals in a different area to the main flow of the ward, following each wards’ guidelines with regard to changing masks and sanitising/washing hands as they entered and left the wards.

Finally, demand for our community meals service, provided with the help of our fantastic volunteers, increased, with our routes delivering to those in need within the community increasing from two to five. This further impacted the catering team because we were not only preparing food for our patients and staff but also increasing the amount of food that was being prepared for our community clients. The team embraced these changes, understanding the importance of our clients receiving a hot nutritional meal five out of seven days a week.

In fact, the teams have adapted well to working in the COVID environment and embraced the challenges that have been put in front of them. As one of the managers, I am proud of each and every one of them and they are a credit to not only the catering services but to the Trust as a whole.

Jane Wills
Deputy Facilities Manager – Community, Somerset NHS Foundation Trust

Our Trust, like everyone else, has found the pandemic a very challenging experience. We had never had to deal with anything similar to use as a comparison. In the early days, the guidance and information was changing daily from the Government and staff were feeling scared, confused, angry, afraid of the unknown, and let down by those of us who, in our job role, were informing them of yet another change.

Team leaders ran donning and doffing sessions for PPE because this was vital for staff safety: they needed to know what they had to wear, when they needed to wear it, and how to put it on and take it off safely. Infection Control also held an online training session that staff were asked to complete. Having watched the news and heard about the quality of the PPE that was being worn, staff needed to be reassured that they would be safe, that there was enough PPE for all of them to use, and that we would not run out. Reassurance was, and still is, key.

The Trust provided free packed lunches for staff to support them over the first few months. This was really appreciated, especially when a chocolate bar was included. Small treats like that made a huge difference.

Throughout the pandemic, our food and equipment catering suppliers have been amazing. I cannot speak more highly of them: they were also working during equally challenging times, with some furloughed and others working from home.

To protect our catering teams, we put restrictions in place very early on. No-one was allowed to enter the kitchen unless they worked in there, or had a very valid reason to be there. We limited where the catering teams could go within the community hospitals and they no longer had access to the wards.

Our Facilities Manager, Anna Warman, set up support for the whole of the hotel services team (supervisors, housekeepers and the catering teams) by organising weekly conference calls. These calls progressed to Skype and then Microsoft Teams, and are now being held every four weeks.

Early on in the pandemic, Anna was aware that the supply of basic products such as soap, gel and hand towels might become challenging, having seen how toilet paper and pasta were like gold dust in the supermarkets. As a way of sharing our stock levels, Anna implemented a spreadsheet on our team drive that listed all products that could potentially be difficult to source, meaning that as a Trust with 13 community hospitals and four mental health sites, we could see the stock levels in all sites and move products around as necessary.
Julie Leonard
Catering Manager Support Services (Estates & Facilities), The Pennine Acute Hospitals NHS Trust, Bury & Rochdale Care Organisation

The COVID pandemic will be one of those moments in history when you remember where you were, what you did, and what you couldn’t do at the time.

First there was the fear and the endless questions from staff that you didn’t really have the answers to. Like them, you were scanning papers, listening to the news, and reading every hospital update that was issued. I couldn’t show my fear, however: I had to keep reassuring staff, thinking what steps I could take immediately whilst Infection Control came up with an action plan.

And so it began:
■ no visitors allowed in the staff dining areas
■ all patient food served on disposables
■ no water jugs, only bottled water
■ reduce the number of tables and chairs in the canteen
■ no milk jugs, just milk portions
■ don’t let staff help themselves to cutlery, hand it to them
■ clean, clean and clean again all areas of contact
■ reduce the need for contact by opening all the doors, and
■ keep your distance. Keep safe. Save the NHS.

The guidelines were constantly evolving. I spent weeks telling people not to wear PPE in the canteen and then had to start telling them they had to wear it.

The number of chairs had to be reduced yet again!

As caterers, I think we had a head start: we already washed our hands regularly, and we already knew about keeping contact areas clean. The only thing we struggled with was keeping a distance: we had to work at that.

Then there was something the ‘older’ or ‘mature’ managers had to conquer – technology. Until COVID, Zoom was an ice lolly and Teams were the people you worked with.

Then the more human side of the pandemic started to filter through. I remember seeing the FaceBook post from a nurse who was in tears because after finishing a long, stressful shift, she couldn’t do her shopping because there was nothing on the supermarket shelves. We had to do something, so we contacted our suppliers, and what a response. Livesey’s and Butcher C&G Meats offered hampers that staff could order and either have delivered to their homes or collect from the catering department.

We also established a pop-up shop for staff, selling all the basics: flour, sugar, butter and the most popular by far, bread mix.

The hospital FaceBook page was then filled with our staff’s attempts at bread making.

The night staff didn’t miss out either. Every Wednesday became treat night. We did curry nights, pie and peas night, and pizza night, which the staff really enjoyed and were extremely appreciative of. My old bones complained though: it had been a long time since I had worked a night shift, washing pots and cleaning up at 11 o’clock at night.

The whole atmosphere around the hospital had, and still has, a true feeling of being in it together. To help staff cope with the stress on the wards, we opened the HAVEN room, a place of peace away from the wards where they could have a brew, catch their breath and gather their thoughts. It was well used.

My role changed too. I became the donations’ logistic manager, controlling all the overwhelming, fabulous and kind donations from businesses and groups large and small. The number of donations was staggering and it was my job to make sure every member of staff got something.

It was, and still is, the worst of times, but also the best of times. If there is one lasting legacy from this, it’s that every child will grow up remembering the colours of a rainbow.
Paul Coulson
Associate SME (Retail Catering) Serco UK & Europe

Serco supported Norfolk and Norwich University Hospital through two critical projects, the first of which was the redesign of the restaurants across the hospital site, to ensure they were safe, met government guidance, and minimised the risk of transmission amongst staff. It also needed to operate on a 24/7 basis and be flexible enough to adapt to frequently changing circumstances.

The Trust was zoned into colour-coded areas, which denoted the possible or confirmed presence of COVID.

The areas were designed to reduce the risk of contact between those who worked in areas with confirmed cases and those who worked in areas of lower risk.

Serco liaised with NNUH to understand the colour-coded areas and how changes in departments would affect staff catering needs. The main restaurant and retail outlets were split into the relevant colour-coded areas, and dedicated seating was arranged in each zone to help staff from different zones segregate.

The redesign was flexible, allowing hospital catering to adapt to changing circumstances. When the number of staff in certain areas increased, we expanded within the restaurant and encroached upon the other areas, with the pressure placed on the main restaurant reduced by adapting food menus at other outlets and introducing hot food catering in different areas of the hospital.

We also erected a marquee with a temporary kitchen, providing a further 70–80 socially distanced seats and additional queuing space.

The second project was based around the food provision. The main restaurant’s night service was extended through to the morning and the breakfast service was opened earlier.

Additional staff restaurant facilities (not retail) were also opened in the different zones, which significantly reduced the need for staff to move between zones to purchase food. The operating hours of these, and existing retail units, were extended.