

**P-04-663 Food in Welsh Hospitals. Correspondence: Petitioner to the Chair
13.01.16**

Dear Jessica,

Please find attached my response to the letter from Health Minister Mark Drakeford on the hospital food petition.

Please can you pass on my thanks to the committee for considering this.

Rachel Flint

Dear Mr Powell,

Thank you so much for taking the time to write to me with the Minister's response to the petition for better hospital food in Wales, and to the committee for considering the petition.

I had hoped Professor Drakeford would have responded by admitting there was a need to look at the provision of meals across Wales, as he does say "food is an essential part of patient care".

In my experience, and from feedback I have received on social media from patients across Wales and England and following articles in the Welsh press, the quality and experience of food in the NHS is variable from board to board, hospital to hospital and at times from ward to ward.

This is by no means limited to Wales as it is something that is highlighted in the English campaign for Better Hospital food across the border.

Professor Drakeford speaks of the "All Wales Hospital Menu Framework" which is being used across Wales to ensure consistency and quality. But boards are all spending varying amounts on food according to results of an FOI carried out by the Daily Post.

The article for this can be found here: <http://www.dailypost.co.uk/news/north-wales-news/north-wales-hospital-patients-being-10674405>

The FOI showed that patients in Betsi were being fed three meals a day for just under £4 and budgets had been cut, something they say is down to reducing wastage and getting more value for money from contractors, meanwhile in other areas levels of spending per head vary.

Patients experiences appear to be wide ranging of foods in hospital wards, with the majority of complaints about food that I have seen through FOIs appearing to be about intolerances and allergies not being considered or catered for – that was also my experience, and of food not being suitable for people with certain conditions.

Yes, I admit that the level of complaints for the number of meals provided across the NHS is low as a proportion, but in my experience submitting an official complaint or even praise is not top of your priority when you are recovering from a major illness or operation, and once you leave (if you have had a particularly bad experience) you probably don't want to relive it again by entering into a lengthy complaints procedure.

In my experience at the Heath hospital in Cardiff I was not given a) Patients must be given choice for all food and fluid options provided, including therapeutic and/or texture modified diets – despite seeing a dietician on numerous occasions and often the only choice as someone with lactose intolerance and a stoma was rice krispies and/or dry toast.

Professor Drakeford himself admits of the over 100 hospitals in Wales there are “varied” arrangements, it would appear from feedback I have received from the public that some hospitals give out menus, some have central kitchens (serving the whole hospitals) while some have individual kitchens serving individual wards – which can mean they don't have the food for people with certain needs etc. Following my blog post on my experiences in the hospital earlier this year (my first in a Welsh NHS provider) my account was picked up by the Welsh media and the National media.

Here are the blog posts outlining my experiences:

<https://adventuresofthebaglady.wordpress.com/2015/10/24/chips-and-boiled-potato-why-can-hospitals-not-feed-people-with-intolerances-and-special-diets/>

<https://adventuresofthebaglady.wordpress.com/page/2/>

<https://adventuresofthebaglady.wordpress.com/2015/11/13/a-fussy-or-unfeedable-mouth-hospital-food-standards-needed-in-wales-stoma-lactoseintolerant-ibd/>

I do understand that the Minister cannot comment on individual cases but from the feedback on social media and on the Wales online, and Daily Post facebook pages I would suggest my experience is not an isolated case.

Some of the experiences written on Crohn's and Colitis Uks facebook page (over 250 comments which range from positive to negative experiences) show that this is not an isolated case.

I would be interested to find out when the "The Welsh Audit Office" report with recommendations will be published and what the Minister will be doing to ensure health boards meet the recommendations.

I am afraid that I disagree with Prof Drakeford and I am not "I reassured by the work of the All Wales Menu Framework group" as experience on the ground shows it is not always the case that it is working.

I do believe that more training and guidance is needed for hard-working staff in the NHS canteen departments to ensure they are able to deal with allergies and dietary needs. I believe better communication systems need to be set up, between wards and dieticians and surgical teams.

I have been invited for a meeting with someone at Cardiff and Vale NHS trust to talk about my experiences and what I feel can be learned from this, and I will be happy to inform the committee of how I feel that meeting goes.