

**Abstract Title:**

Staff Perceptions, Attitudes and Beliefs of Food Available in Hospital

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**Background:** Institutional food in general, and particularly hospital food, is subjected to a great deal of negativity in the press, the literature, and amongst hospital employees. The Regina Qu'Appelle Health Region (RQHR) has conducted a number of patient surveys to find that patients are overall generally satisfied with the meal service. However, staff in RQHR have never been surveyed about their perception of the quality and acceptability of patient meals. The objective of this study was to determine direct care staffs' perceptions of patient meals and what factors may influence these perceptions, as well as staffs' overall satisfaction and acceptability of patient meals when blinded to the intent of the meal.

**Methods:** During the month of February 2017, this two-part study was conducted in two different RQHR acute care hospitals: Part I at the Regina General Hospital and Part II at Pasqua Hospital. Part I measured participants' overall perceptions of hospital meals served to patients and determined if these perceptions were influenced by personal experience as a patient. In Part II, participants evaluated the quality of six meal items over a three-day period, however, participants were not informed that they were evaluating items from patient meals, rather "items considered for the cafeteria menu."

**Results:** Part I saw 57 respondents participate in the survey, with Registered Nurses (RN) and Licensed Nurse Practitioners (LPN) being the most predominant positions (94.5%). The majority of respondents were aged 30-39 years (45.6%). Overall, responses to the six questions related to patient meal ratings were mostly negative. For example, only 8.8% agreed or strongly agreed patient meals look appetizing and just 7.1% rated the meals as being excellent. However, 68.5% agreed that meals served to patients look neat and tidy on the tray. There were no significant differences in patient meal ratings for those respondents who had experiences as a patient and for those who had not. In Part II, a total of 327 surveys were collected for the six meal items offered. The majority of respondents were aged 50-59 (29.8%) and came from a diverse range of units and positions, with 57.7% identifying as someone other than nursing staff (RN/LPN). In contrast to perceptions of meals served to patients, over 50% rated the taste, appearance, smell, healthfulness, and overall quality as either very good or excellent. Overall, 75.2% of respondents reported that they were satisfied, or very satisfied, with the meal items provided. For two meal items in particular, 97.3% (Greek Pork Chop) and 98.2% (Harvest Chili) of respondents were either satisfied or very satisfied.

**Implications & Conclusions:** The findings of this study support the well-accepted notion that hospital food has a reputation for being undesirable. It is apparent that hospital staff share the prevailing negative perception of hospital food, whereas the participants who took part in the taste trials rated hospital food much more positively.

Given the important role direct care staff have on influencing patient perceptions, understanding how patient meals are perceived by this group can have important implications on the patient's experience. Furthermore, if these perceptions could be dispelled and replaced by more positive and accurate views based on experience rather than stereotype, the impact on patient meal acceptance could be dramatically improved.