

Freedom of Information Request: Our Reference CTMUHB_282_23

You asked:

I am writing to highlight the challenges facing people with coeliac disease in accessing gluten free food in hospital and to ask what Cwm Taf Morgannwg University Health Board is doing to help ensure patients with the condition are properly supported and protected. Failure to provide appropriate gluten free food for coeliac patients can cause illness, triggering unpleasant symptoms and potentially slowing recovery.

Coeliac disease is a serious autoimmune condition, affecting around 1 in every 100 people. Symptoms are wide ranging but can include bloating, stomach cramps, vomiting, diarrhoea, iron deficiency anaemia and tiredness. There is no cure for the condition and once diagnosed, the only treatment is a lifelong medically prescribed gluten free diet to prevent ongoing health issues and complications. It is therefore critical that patients with coeliac disease have access to nutritionally balanced gluten free food when visiting or during their time in hospital and equally applies to suitable gluten free provision for employees with coeliac disease.

Unfortunately this is not always the case. A recent survey carried out by Coeliac UKi explored the experiences of people with coeliac disease when in hospital and found that:

- 70% considered medical and catering staff to have a poor or very poor knowledge of the gluten free diet and cross contamination
- 14% received no information at all on the suitability of the meal
- 78% of respondents were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with the provision of gluten free food in hospital
- Around 70% rated the quality of gluten free provision as poor or very poor across all meal times.
- 75% rated the variety of gluten free provision as poor or very poor across all meal times

This has concerning implications for the wellbeing of a patient population reliant on a strict gluten free diet to remain healthy, even more so when they may be vulnerable or in poor health. It is vital therefore that hospitals provide all staff involved in food provision, with appropriate training on the gluten free diet, allergen management and the risks from cross contamination.

It's essential that good quality, varied, nutritionally balanced gluten free food is available to patients with coeliac disease. Unfortunately when people are already dealing with health issues, it is often the case that they don't have the time or energy to make a formal complaint and therefore your formal records may not represent a true picture of the problems surrounding access to gluten free food in your hospitals.

There is guidance available to help you provide the greatest support to patients. Coeliac UK is an independent charity and works with organisations including hospitals and schools to train their staff to ensure safe delivery of gluten free food. The charity offers training and has a Gluten Free accreditation scheme. You can find out more here: <https://glutenfreeacademy.org.uk/healthcare-sector> or contact them here: <https://www.coeliac.org.uk/form/website-general-enquiries/>

Please see the experiences below that one of our members reported during her stay the Royal Glamorgan Hospital:

Very limited gluten-free menu options were available. Staff also had limited knowledge of what ingredients contained gluten (e.g wheat, rye, barley etc) so were unable to confirm what foods were gluten-free. When there was nothing GF on the lunch/dinner menu I would request an omelette or jacket potato for example. Also when in the surgery day ward, I was only offered sandwiches, none of which were gluten-free.

With this in mind, please can you let me know:

1. What is Cwm Taf Morgannwg University Health Board's policy regarding provision of gluten free food for patients with coeliac disease?

The provision of gluten free food for patients is picked up through screening at patient admission and this transfers to the patients' medical records and bed plan. In the case of a patient with specific allergen requirements which may or may not involve a referral for texture modified meals (IDDSI) a Multi Disciplinary Team (MDT) approach is undertaken. Cwm Taf Morgannwg University Health Board (CTM UHB) is currently undergoing a menu review with a proposed launch for late August 2023. In this menu-provision it will see the health board moving from an a la carte style menu to a two week rotational menu focusing on an increased range of food options. The health board uses the CTM UHB Central Production Unit (CPU) for a range of soups, main meals, desserts and accompaniments, the site is however not a Gluten-free manufacturing facility and hence cannot make Gluten-free claims on the products it manufactures. The health board also purchases other food products from NHS Wales Shared Services Partnership (NWSSP) All Wales Contracts that feature on the menus. In the case of a patient with Coeliac Disease then the Catering team at the relevant hospital advise on the food products that can be provided and are suitable for a gluten free diet. There are contracted items e.g. Gluten Free Bread, Cereal products that can be purchased specifically for patients with this requirement. If a patient is on a Speech and Language Therapies (SaLT) prescribed International Dysphagia Diet Standardisation Initiative (IDDSI) diet then there is a range of level meals which are classed as allergen aware e.g. gluten free. The All Wales Nutrition and Catering Standards for Food and Fluid Provision for Hospital Inpatients, 2011 (currently being revised) references the following in relation to Coeliac Disease:

"Coeliac disease is caused by an auto-immune reaction to a component of gluten, a protein found in certain cereals, namely wheat, barley and rye. Some individuals with coeliac disease are also sensitive to oats. A gluten free diet is the sole treatment for coeliac disease and for the skin condition dermatitis herpetiformis. Consumption of even a minute quantity of gluten by someone with coeliac disease can result in malabsorption, gastro-intestinal symptoms and fatigue. Regulations define gluten-containing cereals as wheat, rye, barley, oats, spelt, kamut or their hybridised strains. It is found in a wide range of manufactured and processed foods, and imposes considerable restriction of food choice and variety. A menu should never claim to be

gluten free unless this has been confirmed, and, as manufacturing processes can change, the menu must be continually monitored to ensure it remains free of gluten. For full guidance to ensure safe food transport, storage, preparation”.

[WalesNutritionCateringStandardsHospitalInpatients.pdf \(bapen.org.uk\)](#)

CTM Catering Food Policy is currently being rewritten to include a wider range of options for all dietary and allergy requirements.

2. What processes and training are in place for all staff involved in the provision of food to ensure patients with special dietary needs are easily identified, and provided with the appropriate food and drink?

In the case of food manufacturing, staff at the CPU are given induction training that includes food safety and allergen awareness. As a minimum Supervisors are given time to sit the following training provided by the Food Standards Agency (FSA) [Food Standards Agency food allergy online training](#). The CPU is accredited by STS as a third party audit standard and provides allergen sheets for all products manufactured. This is relevant as we manufacture our own meals for patient feeding and supply meals to other health boards.

In the hospital setting catering staff are again trained to Food Safety level 2 which includes allergen awareness, these staff are ward-based Caterers and will take patient food orders at bed-side. This is with the exception of one district general hospital in CTM UHB where the health board does not have ward-based Catering and nursing staff take patient food orders and serve meals to patients. All food products are labelled with allergen information from the CPU and allergen sheets are updated frequently and are held in the ward-based kitchens. All other bought in items have allergen information available through All Wales Contracts that are checked for approval by NWSSP dieticians. If a ward-based Caterer has any queries relating to allergies in patient feeding the Supervisors and Catering Managers support, and also the Facilities Hub Technical Compliance Team. The Technical Compliance team will frequently source items for specific allergies. We are in the process of generating a Food Safety module which includes allergens that will be available via ESR for all food handling staff.

3. How is allergen information shared with patients to help them make food choices? How does this take account of patients' varied capacity to advocate for themselves?

Allergen sheets are available in ward-based kitchens and via the catering teams to inform patient choice and allergen information. In the case of patients' with varied capacity a MDT approach will be taken and bed plans/patient notes updated. CTM is currently transferring to a digital system where all information is available via an app on an iPad. In early 2024 clinical sign off will commence at our sites so that patients food orders are all done at patient bedside and nursing teams have signed off any dietary requirements (or SALT with texture modified). All allergens will be held in the digital portal ensuring all staff and patients have access to this information for forward planning or at point of order.

4. Will you commit to reviewing policies, training and systems for the hospitals in your area?

CTM UHB are fully committed to reviewing all policies, training and systems for all areas of patient feeding, food safety and nutrition and employ a MDT to undertake this. CTM UHB would welcome any engagement from Coeliac UK and as a course of action will link into the training they offer.

5. Will you commit to displaying the catering guidance poster in food prep areas, canteens and on wards across the Trust?

Yes – please can it be forwarded.