

A MENU PLANNING GUIDE FOR LARGE ARMY HOSPITALS

by 4589

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INTRODUCTION

Planning meals in a hospital is an important function of food service management. When hospital services are being observed, and often judged, nothing rates more praise or blame from patients and staff than the meals that are served to them. The public also looks critically at the food served in hospitals. Even though visitors may not be permitted to use the food services, they need only to be present when meals are served to form an opinion of the quality of the food. Thus, the food service can be an important force for good or bad public relations.

To the patient, staff or visitor, a menu is only a list of foods available for a particular meal. To the dietitian responsible for planning that menu, it is a "blueprint" for the activities of the food service. The menu determines the labor, equipment, and space needed to prepare and serve the meals and affects economy of operation.

Skillful menu planning is considered the basis of a successfully operated food service. Thoughtful planning and extensive knowledge are required because of the numerous interrelated factors that must be considered. It is in the planning stages that managerial problems can be anticipated and avoided.

The type of menu selected for any individual institution should be tailored to the food preferences of its patients and to the personnel, equipment, and food budget available. Menus for hospitals, in particular, must be viewed in terms of their limitations. It has often been stated that no other food service

has a greater number of "captive" customers. In support of this statement, Kapfer (1968) emphasized that in commercial or private institutions the customer generally is able to choose the type of food service, menu items, and accompanying cost he desires. However, in a hospital, the customer must accept what is offered. He can bring pressure if he is dissatisfied, but he can not go elsewhere. These limitations provide a challenge to the dietitian.

Menu planning, in general, is concerned with three primary objectives: meeting nutritional standards, economical diets, and acceptability of menus. This involves consideration of complex criteria that often are obscured when menus are planned manually. The introduction of electronic data processing as a management tool in food service operations has led to research in the application of scientific techniques for menu development. Given accurate data, the computer is capable of assembling these various factors in a matter of seconds and providing an optimal solution to the menu planning problem. Various authors indicate that the potential of menu planning by computer has not been reached because of a lack of adequate dietary data that must be supplied by dietitians. This would suggest that, in addition to further research, increased emphasis must be placed on development of menu planning skills. A limited amount of experience is offered to students at the college level; however, greater emphasis is placed on practical application in the dietetic internship program.

The major purpose of this study was to develop a menu planning guide for dietetic interns at army hospitals to assist them in selection of menu items for a varied number of diets. A secondary purpose was to review the literature on menu planning principles, procedures, and current trends in computer assisted menu planning.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Menu Planning Factors

Planning menus is a complex and time-consuming task because there are numerous factors that must be considered. Nutrient content, cost, acceptability, variety, and equipment and personnel available frequently are identified as limiting factors. Item selection is influenced by factors peculiar to the situation and by policies of the institution (Fowler et al., 1961).

Another important consideration is the capability of the menu planner. Kapfer (1968) emphasized that the academic knowledge of the basic requirements for menu planning should be tempered with experience. The ability of the menu planner to visualize menu items as they appear on the tray and the recognition of flavor combinations as applied to standard products requires a "taste sense" and actual experience in food production.

Menu planning frequently is a cooperative effort rather than an individual responsibility. Stokes (1960) indicated that the utilization of several staff members offers an excellent opportunity for staff development and contributes toward critical evaluation of the menu.