

Life is hard enough for any hospital catering manager—why make it harder by choosing over complicated, over sophisticated equipment. Roy Gernon, Catering Manager, Mid Essex Hospitals tells Hospital Caterer how a new cook chill/freeze patient feeding system is providing benefits

Keep It Simple: Cook Chill/Freeze

Patients and hospital staff were the first to notice the benefits of Mid Essex Hospital's new cook chill/freeze patient catering system, which was implemented on June 1st, 2001

This was also the time when Medirest took over the contract for running Mid Essex Hospital's Catering Services.

Mid Essex hospitals include: Broomfield, Chelmsford; St Johns, Chelmsford; St Michael's, Braintree; St Peter's, Maldon and William Julian Courtauld, Braintree.

Roy Gernon is the Group's Catering Manager, working within the Hotel Services department. Patients now receive a new style of foodservice, as do hospital staff, so both parties benefit from the investment in the new foodservice system.

Mid Essex Hospital's spent in the region of £600,000 in preparing for its new cook chill/freeze patient catering system.

Excluding the cost of regeneration trolleys, this money was spent on the removal of existing bulk food cooking equipment from the main kitchen, upgrading the kitchen facilities, including new refrigeration storage, and refurbishment of the staff restaurant.

At the heart of the new catering system is a cook chill/freeze food regeneration system including Versigen regeneration trolleys.



Hostess service from the Versigen - note the two end shelves, added by Versigen at the Catering Manager's request

Roy Gernon has absolute confidence in the Versigen product because "design input was by Roy Gernon", he says. Versigen and Gernon worked together to design the right trolley for a modern hospital environment.

The Hospital chose the Versigen 8 with 3 x GN thermo panel heated hot top version of the regeneration trolley as the most suitable for its purposes - providing sufficient capacity for feeding a ward, maneuverability and ease of handling. Some smaller Versigen single compartment 'Minor' trolleys with 2 x GN heated top displays are used in day hospitals.

The Versigen 8 trolley features the Chillogen fridge/oven combination on one side and a refrigerated compartment on the other.

Each of 40 Versigen trolleys are based at ward level and stocked with the lunch or evening meal from purpose built 'dollies', also supplied by Versigen. These are light, mobile trolleys fitted with an insulated 'hood' to maintain chilled temperatures. The dollies ensure there is no double handling of food.



All dishes are kept piping hot throughout the meal service, thanks to the thermo panel hot top and overhead heated gantry

Each dolly holds cassettes of cold and hot food, which simply slot into the Versigen trolley for refrigerated holding until re-heating begins at the desired time.

“Using our old system of preparing food in bulk, we normally had a one and a half hour window to get the food out to the patients from the main kitchen”, explains Roy Gernon. “But the beauty of the new cook chill/freeze system is that you can do all of the preparation 2-3 hours in advance. You could even prepare overnight if needed. This way the food is on the ward when it is required”.

Since the new system was implemented in 2001, food is delivered into chilled storage at a maximum temperature of 3°C. When it is required for use, it is taken to the refrigerated 'decant' area for loading onto dollies, ready for distribution to the wards.

Altogether, the hospitals serve 1000 lunches and 850 evening meals. Some 46 staff work with Roy Gernon.

St Michael's and St Peter's have used the Versigen trolleys for five years and have “experienced no problems”, says Gernon. “We have a service contract with Versigen - the service is good, they are out next day if need be”.

“The trolley is easy to use and lighter to use than other regeneration trolleys I've tried”, says Gernon, adding, “they are simple to load and keep food refrigerated until the trolley switches automatically to reheat 40 minutes before service”.

Another advantage is that cold food cassettes are half the size of hot food cassettes, so there is no confusion about which side of the regeneration trolley to put them. The dollies are also light and maneuverable which means, “the walls don't get knocked about”.

Aesthetics are important too: “The trolley looks different: it's nice looking, unobtrusive and displays food properly”, says Gernon, “we can have two hot plates on for the hot food and leave the other plate off for the cold

food”.

Versigen's trolley has refrigeration on both sides, ensuring safe holding of food prior to heating and a sufficient capacity to serve all the food required for the ward at once. There is only one button to press because all the relevant temperature and meal time information has been programmed in by Roy Gernon. This avoids the temptation for staff to fiddle with buttons. A shelf has been added to each end of the unit to help with plating.

Food is reheated to a minimum of 75°C and probed by hostess staff to ensure it has reached temperature prior to serving.

Chilled food is currently supplied from Tillery Valley Foods and Anglia Crown. “We trialed the food at St Peter's and St Michael's” says Roy Gernon, “to see what the patients most liked and to find the best regeneration time”.

Hospital staff at Broomfield also benefit from the kitchen refurbishment which includes a dedicated hot cooking area and an 8°C salad and sandwich prep area.

“The refurbishment means that we can really improve the service to the hospital staff at Broomfield” says Roy Gernon. “Our chefs cater for the 500 staff meals we serve daily and for special diets and add-ons to the cook chill/freeze components such as cold desserts”.



Just two hostess staff can serve a complete ward.

The maneuverability of the Versigen trolley allows it to be taken into the smallest wards.

Note: Versigen trolleys built for the Australian market feature full-length glass sneeze screens.