MEDIA RELEASE

Tuesday 16 February 2016

Victorian and NSW hospitals put the patient at centre of procurement process

As consumers, many of us take for granted the ability to open food packaging easily but for the elderly or those with a disability, food packaging can be an insurmountable barrier.

This is why Health Purchasing Victoria (HPV) and HealthShare NSW have put the patient at the centre of the procurement process by mandating that public hospital suppliers provide Packaging Accessibility Ratings (PAR), which show how easily their products can be opened by people who are frail, aged or unwell.

Victoria and NSW combined represent more than half of Australia's public hospitals.

The PAR estimates the percentage of consumers who can safely open portion control food packaging. The PAR uses a scale, with the highest Rating being a +8 denoting a product that can be easily and safely opened for 95% of people, to a -8 denoting it's hard to open and may cause injury for over 40% of the population.

It is used to compare items that are otherwise similar. For example if one supplier has a higher rating than another, it will provide them with a competitive advantage when hospital staff select products from the HPV Catering Supplies contract.

The PAR was developed in collaboration with HealthShare NSW, Arthritis Australia, Nestle and GTRI (USA).

In hospitals, hard to open food packaging represents a significant risk to patient care as it prevents patients from receiving adequate nutrition.

Health Purchasing Victoria (HPV)'s CEO Megan Main said HPV's sourcing decisions were driven by what supports better patient care.

"When it comes to food products in a hospital, we had a responsibility from a procurement perspective to source an accessible product that wouldn't impede quality care.

"We know from health service feedback that in many cases if a patient is unable to open the packaging, they simply don't eat the food," said HPV's Chief Executive, Megan Main.

"This is a win for patients, and a win for industry, and delivers better value for money in health care," says Carmen Rechbauer, Director of Food and Patient Support Services, HealthShare NSW.

Arthritis Australia welcomed the landmark initiative and called for other health procurement bodies to adopt the approach of Victoria and NSW. "It is both frustrating and unnecessary to see food go uneaten because of hard to open packaging, especially when many suppliers have redesigned their packaging to make it easy to open."

"Arthritis Australia calls on the remaining state governments and private health care providers to follow the lead of HPV and HealthShare NSW and put the patient at the centre of the procurement process," said Wendy Favorito, Director & Consumer Representative, Arthritis Australia.

HPV has also provided suppliers with a set of Packaging Accessibility Design Guidelines to assist manufacturers to design easy to open and read packaging. These Guidelines identify the most common accessibility issues associated with packaging and suggest possible ways these issues can be overcome.

They are available upon request from Health Purchasing Victoria and HealthShare NSW. The Ratings are increasingly shared with other public and private hospitals and aged care nationally.

For more details on the initiative, visit: http://www.healthshare.nsw.gov.au/services/food-patient

About Health Purchasing Victoria (HPV): HPV works collaboratively with the Victorian public health sector to help ease cost pressure on public health through strategic procurement, managing more 40 contract categories covering clinical, indirect materials and services and medical equipment. Victorian public hospitals and health services are mandated under the *Health Services Act* 1988 to use HPV contracts. HPV is an independent statutory authority responsible to the Minister of Health and works closely with the Department of Health and Human Services.

About HealthShare NSW: HealthShare NSW is the shared services organisation of NSW Health and is the largest public sector organisation of its kind in Australia. It provides corporate services including finance, workforce, human resources and procurement services. Responsible for the provision of inpatient food services in NSW pubic hospitals, HealthShare NSW provides around 22 million meals a year.

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