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The hospital catering challenge

Yesterday's report into hospital catering by the National Assembly's Public Accounts Committee claimed that hospital catering services across Wales are inconsistent and the pace of improvement too slow. Peter Marrs, Sales Director at Abertillery-based food production company, Tillery Valley, comments on the challenges faced by hospital caterers and the work of Tillery Valley in producing 600,000 meals per week for catering departments across the public sector.

Mr Marrs said: "Hospital caterers are asked to maintain and improve standards, often in the face of spending cuts and inflating food costs. The challenge of matching nutritional standards and dietary requirements to shrinking budgets is difficult but not insurmountable. We work closely with health trusts across the UK to design menus for specific budgets.

"At Tillery Valley, we have excellent collaboration across all of our professional teams. Our two in-house dietitians build menus around what is required nutritionally and our product development team ensures that we deliver the highest quality product within these strict criteria.

"We have a wide variety of menu mixes which take into account regional tastes, cultural preferences and specific dietary requirements. Nutrition is a vitally important element of patient care and we work with health trusts to provide a varied menu with a range of options to make mealtimes a positive experience for individuals. The average stay in hospital has reduced to less than seven days, but this still requires a full range of healthy-balanced meals to provide choices to those who may experience a full menu cycle."

Part of yesterday's report recommends that the Welsh Government should monitor the progress of NHS bodies in delivering its guidance around patient

catering, including sourcing local food which contributes to a health-balanced diet for patients.

Mr Marrs concludes: “Delivered meals can often increase patient choice, flexibility with the range of products available, improve the quality of the meals and improve efficiency.”

Companies such as Tillery Valley may well be increasingly in demand as they continue to provide a consistent, cost-effective service to the public sector; a catering service to meet a wide range of patient needs whilst adhering to the nutritional standards within a specified budget.