

NHS accused of wasting £27m on uneaten hospital food

147,000 meals left unserved in 2011-12 by one NHS trust

By; Jeremy Laurance

The number of NHS hospital meals that were left uneaten rose above nine million in 2011-12, according to a survey. The wasted food cost **the NHS £27m** with the worst trusts reporting more than **a quarter of meals returned**.

Data analysis specialists SSentif, who conducted the research, said the high number of meals being returned suggested the Government's Protected Mealtimes Initiative – under which wards are kept free of visitors and non-essential activities to ensure patients get the food they need – is failing. The survey of **200 NHS hospitals and mental health trusts** has revealed widespread over-ordering and inefficiency, with the result that the cost of wasted food is continuing to rise.

Worst offender was the South West Yorkshire NHS Mental Health Trust where **147,000 meals were unserved, amounting to 26 per cent of their total waste at a cost of £442,000**. Hospitals in Northumberland, Tyne and Wear, Hull, Leicester, Bristol, Leeds and London all reported wastage of more than £500,000 a year.

The figures show wide variations in the amount spent on patient meals between NHS trusts, ranging from **£2.19 a day to £18.14**. However higher spend did not lead to fewer meals returned. Judy Aldred, managing director of SSentif, said: "These figures are concerning because the cost of wasted meals has increased again since we last conducted this research twelve months ago.

"The findings of this research are worrying for two reasons; firstly the high number of returned meals would seem to have troubling implications for patient nourishment. Secondly, at a time when the whole of the public sector is currently trying to work to smaller budgets and reduce waste, a loss of £27m is impossible to ignore."
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