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**An approach to provide safe food for hospitalized patients of the National Hospital of Sri Lanka**

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The concept of food safety becomes critical when the food is prepared and served to hospitalized patients whose immunity is low. This study was carried out to assess the knowledge and practices related to food safety and personal hygiene among workers at the National Hospital of Sri Lanka.

An interviewer-administered questionnaire and observations were used to gather information. Observations were done at all levels of the food service management system. Data were analyzed descriptively and presented as percentages. All 31 staff members involved in the food service management system were included in the study. Their mean age was 42.6 years (range=21-59). The majority consisted of males (52%) educated up to Grade 6-11 (52%). The questionnaire based assessment showed inadequate knowledge on food hygiene practices: 54.8% of workers did not know the correct refrigerator temperature; 51.6% thought that chilling or freezing eliminates harmful germs from food; 19.4% responded that fresh milk does not need refrigeration for its storage; 38.7% did not know that prepared food stored without covering can result in contamination. However, the majority (80.6%) knew that raw food should be separated from cooked food. The knowledge of workers regarding personnel hygiene was good: almost all the workers responded that washing hands after using the toilet is important. The observations revealed the availability of two separate tiled floor rooms for the storage of raw materials; a separate place for cutting and washing; a tiled clean kitchen floor; and almost all the kitchen workers had trimmed clean nails and short hair. However, there were some drawbacks in their food safety practices: Keeping vegetables on the floor during raw material inspection; keeping cooked food containing utensils open prior to distribution; and unavailability of uniforms, gloves and masks for food handlers. Further, observations revealed that the kitchen practices such as raw material unloading, cooking practices, utensil cleaning and kitchen cleaning were not at a satisfactory level. This study concluded that the knowledge and practices of workers on food safety were inadequate. Therefore, it is important to improve their knowledge by education and training programs on food safety and hygiene to provide safe food for patients.

Keywords: Food safety, food handlers, patients, personal hygiene, safety practices