

ALL-PARTY PARLIAMENTARY GROUP ON VEGETARIANISM AND VEGANISM

Institutional catering for vegetarians and vegans

16.00-18.00 Wednesday 1 March 2017, Committee Room 17

The chair, Christina Rees MP drew attendees' attention to a [joint letter to the Health Secretary](#), Jeremy Hunt, from the officers of the APPG, asking the Department of Health to look into setting guidance on the labelling of animal products in medicine. The letter was in part a response to information provided by Dr Kinesh Patel at the last meeting of the APPG.

Slides that the speakers used for their presentations can be viewed at <http://vegappg.org.uk/>

Heather Russell, Dietitian, [The Vegan Society](#)

- It is important that all institutions have an understanding of vegetarian and vegan diets, because they make up 3% of the population, and are not localised in one place.
- 14% of vegans are over 65. People in care settings can lose the ability to express dietary preference, and end up eating meat. Nutritional care should consider and meet dietary requirements and preferences. Advanced care planning is very important to make one's belief system known.
- Catering in care settings is often found lacking for vegetarians and vegans – Vegetarian for Life have found numerous instances of animal products being fed to vegetarians and vegans, and one social care training provider teaches that fish may be suitable for vegetarians. Training and communication of need needs to be improved.
- The Vegan Society has been contacted by many people who aren't given a vegan option, even where one could be available, in care settings. Potato croquettes were given as an example of supposedly complete meal that had been offered to a vegan in hospital. Better information is out there – groups like Humane Society International offer vegan cooking classes to hospitals.
- Nuts and seeds are an important part of a vegan diet, but many care settings are entirely nut-free as a precaution for people with allergies. If no residents have an allergy, it is important to consider whether nut-free catering is appropriate.
- Nutritionally vulnerable people who need to put on weight are fed puddings and supplement drinks, but vegans in these circumstances often just get fruit, which won't provide sufficient calories. Vegan deserts exist already, as do vegan supplement drinks, but these are not normally offered.
- School milk schemes and the government programme providing free milk and supplements to benefit recipients doesn't cover vegan milk or supplements, meaning vegan children go without.

Leonie Milliner, CEO, [Association for Nutrition](#) (AfN)

- AfN is a quality-assured register of nutritionists working in public health and food services. They believe that to make positive changes to the nation's diet we need a skilled and competent workforce, who know about cultural and ethical dietary choices.
- AfN assessed the competence of health and social care nutritionists, for the government. They found 89% of the health and social care workforce were at some point responsible for giving advice on food choice, but only 50% had ever had any training on this.
- With the Department of Health, they have created the first workforce standards for nutrition, which are relevant not just to health and social care staff, but also leisure, catering and fitness.

- Aiming to make sure that public investment in education is done wisely, appropriately and effectively engaging the workforce. They quality assure training on malnutrition, hydration, and workplace nutrition, among others.
- Organisations that provide frontline training on nutrition should discuss becoming AfN accredited, to ensure their learning is benchmarked.

Maria Brenton, Ambassador on Senior Cohousing, [UK Cohousing Network](#) (UKCN)

- The UKCN seeks to expand the range of housing choices that older people have, and promote the idea of senior cohousing communities. Over 18 years UKCN has built a women-only cohousing scheme in High Barnet, which is a mutual company run by the residents.
- Cohousing is when a group lives together, sharing a core value, with shared community meals. Spaces are codesigned, and there is public and private space, so it is shared, but not a commune. UK society isn't very empathetic to people wanting to come together to do their own thing.
- 60% of women over 75 live on their own. Loneliness and isolation is a huge problem. Sheltered housing isn't built with a sense of community, and such schemes are not fit to get old in. Cohousing schemes are built for ease of social interaction – most care homes are not easy to interact in.
- Cohousing is about choosing to live within a group of your choosing, where you know, and are known by, your neighbours. This is different to most people's experience of housing in later life.
- Cohousing residents share core values and share an identity, with people who understand them – there are cohousing projects for older lesbians, so people don't feel pressured to go back in to the closet as many do in mainstream care. In Holland, there is a Chinese cohousing project, where residents share a cuisine, culture and language. There is big demand for a sense of community in older age; this could mean older vegans and vegetarians choosing cohousing.
- It is a major battle to get support from the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) for cohousing communities. There is currently no government support for cohousing, but some measures will soon make it easier. There have been moves to encourage custom-built community housing – you can get a grant and a project manager and build the community yourself, with help from the government.

Norman Dinsdale, Senior Lecturer in Hospitality Management, Sheffield Hallam University

- Previously institutional catering was run primarily by mothers looking to make some extra money. The supply side hasn't changed much, but there have been big changes in the catering expectations of residents, particularly vegetarians and vegans.
- This could be too large a challenge for some caterers. You can find people who use meat stock, or animal products in a vegan meal assuming people won't notice. Kitchens are not always considerate, and profit often comes before ethical considerations.
- Caterers must turn a profit, and need to get the food out. Some have forgotten that a healthy diet can be a medicine in its own right.
- The Care Quality Commission (CQC) found that some care homes don't give people food choice, or support their choices, and some are failing to identify and support people at risk of malnutrition. Some are excellent caterers, the Royal Brompton in London for example, but some aren't, and still charge more than a five star hotel would charge.
- People with dementia want to eat when they are hungry, not whenever they are given food. Caterers, medical staff, dietitians and nutritionists need to work together much more closely. This is made harder by the fact that 14% of care homes don't have enough staff to meet needs.

- There are still plenty of poor quality food and hydration services in schools and care homes, but caterers are now finding it is harder to fix poor provision than it is to deliver proper food first and every time. If catering can improve it will bring in more money for the care home and the Exchequer. There will be resistance from current staff and management, but it can be done.

Audience Q&A

Kerry McCarthy MP and **Christina Rees MP** both spoke about the awful provision of vegetarian and vegan catering on public transport. Kerry McCarthy asked how spaces in cohousing schemes are allocated, and how men or omnivores can be prohibited, because spaces are normally allocated by need.

- **MB:** There is no public money, so the group can allocate the housing as they wish. They have an agreed set of criteria to allocate against and are inclusive as possible. Women-only housing is fine, legally. Anyone could live in vegan cohousing, they would have to live vegan whilst there.
- **Vanessa Clarke, House of Commons staff,** talked about the power of sharing meals. She worked on a project producing meals that can be shared by everyone. You can see people's behaviour change when they come together to share food.

Nitin Mehta, Young Indian Vegetarians, asked whether catering in care needs urgent regulation?

- **Kerry McCarthy** said that funding social care and joining it up with health services is currently being debated – there has been long-term underfunding and we are on the verge of a crisis in social care. Caterers cut corners on food and staff, but it isn't just about enforcement – are people prepared to pay more? We need to show respect – everyone has the right to decide what they eat and why.
- **LM:** CQC and Ofsted now have responsibility to look at nutrition, so inspection can be used to hold them to account. They now need to look at whether special diets are catered for.

Jules Williams suggested vegans could be used as nutritional advisors for the CQC, and asked why catering schools still aren't teaching how easy it is to make animal-free meals?

- **ND:** Schools are dedicated to French and Italian cuisine, with minimal time for vegetarian food. They are slow to change.
- **LM:** We need to find the points of most significant influence. At Brakes, a large food supplier, AfN realised it is the driver who deals face-to-face with cooks, and who is asked whether there are options for certain diets. They are now training the delivery drivers in nutrition and diet.
- **Tom Embury, British Dietetic Association,** said the CQC is keen to work with organisations to help them inspect to a higher standard, as the BDA currently is.

Doug Maw asked whether any nutrition courses have a requirement for plant-based competency?

- **LM:** AfN include consideration of ethical and environmental choices in their quality assurance, and all approved courses must include this. Not all suppliers sign up to the AfN standard, so consumer and commissioners need to know this, when choosing the most appropriate training.

Claudia Tarry, Humane Society International, asked how we can normalise vegan food, so it is something we should all eat more of, and caterers should produce, rather than a special diet?

- **ND:** Vegans are small in number. Most people have an expectation of what restaurants offer – when most customers want one type of food it is hard to get suppliers to change.

Robbie Lock, Plant Based News, asked why, considering the health benefits of a plant-based diet, veganism isn't prescribed or advocated in health and social care? Veganism can be about human health outcomes, not just animal advocacy and environmental concerns.

- **HR:** We should be promoting keeping well, through diet and exercise, not picking up the pieces after. For example, the power of lifestyle change on type 2 diabetes is still very undervalued.
- **LM:** The Hospital Caterers Association is aware that care homes have potential to be places to model good practice – we need to move from just giving vegans a diet of fruit and vegetables.

About the APPG on Vegetarianism and Veganism

The All Party Parliamentary Group on Vegetarianism and Veganism provides a forum for discussing issues around vegetarianism and veganism. NCVO is delighted to provide the secretariat for this group. The group is funded by the [Vegan Society](#), [Vegetarian for Life](#) and the [Vegetarian Society](#).

For more information please visit <http://vegappg.org.uk/>