

# eCommunicating patient feeding assistance needs

## Introduction

Providing assistance to eat and drink is a key directive of NSW Health's Nutrition Care Policy. However, the assistance each patient requires can vary and there was not an effective system in place to communicate patient assistance needs.

South Eastern Sydney Local Health District's local multidisciplinary working party investigated the extent of this problem and developed potential solutions. This project is an example of strong cooperation across disciplines (nursing, nutrition, allied health, IT and food services) to improve patient nutrition care practices.

## Key activities

The team implemented a simple and uniform method to communicate patient's mealtime assistance needs at Prince of Wales Hospital, in consultation with clinicians.

A short mandatory question was included in Electronic Medical Records (eMR) when ordering patients' diets, answered by ticking one of three options; nil assistance required; assistance to open food packages; or full supervision required. This information then downloads to the food service IT system and triggers the appropriate brightly coloured



tray slip, which clearly indicates the level of assistance the patient requires at each and every mealtime.

## Key achievements

This enhancement to eMR has resulted in a significant increase in the number of patients identified to require assistance and the number receiving assistance.

A review of the patients identified to receive assistance after the implementation of the eMR enhancement displayed 19 per cent were flagged to require assistance to open meal packs (up from 10 per cent pre enhancement) and eight per cent for full assistance to eat (up from five per cent), showing a significant improvement in the identification of patients needing assistance had been achieved. The current identification rate now matches the previously identified level of need.

Improved identification of patients requiring assistance to eat and drink

