



May 08, 2013 00:00 BST

Research on the menu

A Northumbria University academic has joined forces with a care home company to analyse and optimise their menus for each season.

Registered nutritionist Carole Marshall is working with Hadrian Healthcare Group in a year-long project led by executive chef Simon Lawrence and operational support manager Karen Brimble.

Simon has just won the northern heat of the National Association of Care Catering Care Cook of the Year. He prepared one of the nutritionally assessed meals from the new spring menus.

Simon said: “Hadrian Healthcare Group has always used fresh local produce as far as possible as we believe this is the best way to provide good seasonal food for our residents.

“This year we wanted to see if there were any ways in which we could improve the new menus by taking expert scientific advice on nutrition and hydration from Northumbria University. Optimising these factors can be the key to improving the health of older people.

“We’re designing and assessing the menus a season at a time and asking our residents and their relatives for their views and preferences too. We’re building these into the summer menus which are the next set to be analysed.”

Carole, who works as a senior lecturer in human nutrition and food science at Northumbria University, said: “Food is the highlight of the day for older people in care and if we can provide appealing, nutritious meals which help to make someone healthier and happier it has a beneficial impact on the person concerned, their family and friends and obviously the carers and care home too.”

Northumbria University is also working with Hadrian on a training programme for staff, which will focus on how to meet the individual dietary needs of residents and the importance of individual food choices when catering for various health conditions.

Carole added: “Key factors which influence nutrient intake include the serving and presentation of food and the environment in which food is presented. The entire dining experience is important for older people. For people with dementia, something as simple as the colour of crockery can be crucial as the colour of the plate can influence the amount of food that is consumed.

“By working with care home staff to explain these issues we can give them the knowledge to help older people make healthier choices to improve their quality of life.”

Date posted: May 8, 2013

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