

Factors Influencing Adherence to a Calorie Posting Policy in Irish Public Hospitals

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Executive Summary: Evidence shows calorie posting has positive effects on consumer food choice and industry/catering practices; however, few studies report the extent to which calorie posting is implemented as designed. The current study found partial adherence to a calorie posting policy across Irish public hospitals. Factors influencing implementation were related to the hospital internal and external environment, features of the calorie posting policy and the implementation process. The study findings highlight the need for strategies at different levels to maximise adherence to the policy.

Why is this study important?

In an effort to promote staff health and wellbeing, and to act as an exemplar across the public service, the HSE introduced a calorie posting policy in 2015. Since its introduction, progress reports suggest inconsistent implementation of the policy across hospitals in Ireland. The current study assessed the level of adherence to the calorie posting policy and identified influencing factors.

What methods were used?

The study used a mixed methods design, with a nested case study consisting of four acute public hospitals (cases) for the qualitative component (see figure below).

Quantitative Phase

Analysis of implementation progress reports

- Initial picture of policy adherence across hospitals
- Informed the selection of four hospitals for the follow-on qualitative phase



Qualitative Phase

Observations and interviews were conducted and analysed

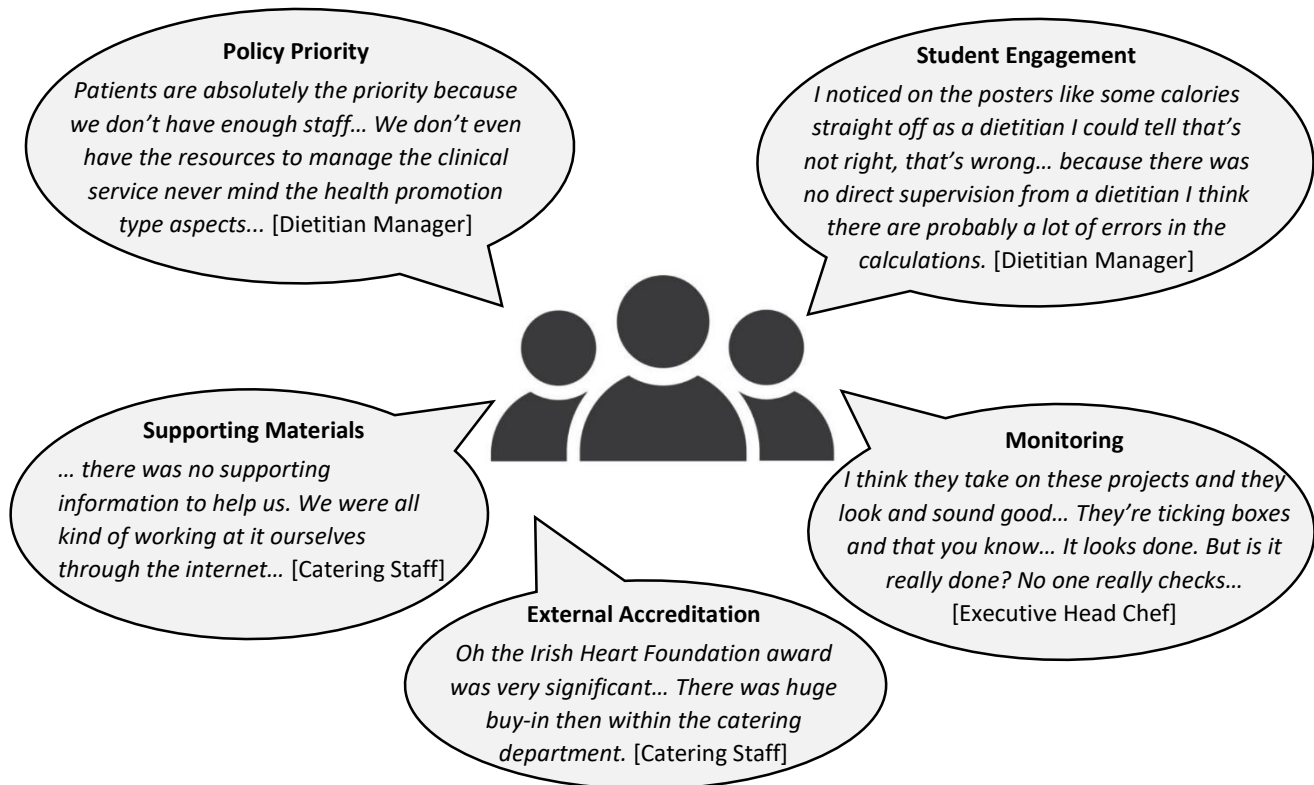
- Researcher observed adherence levels
- Stakeholders' views of policy adherence and influencing factors

What were the study findings?

There was an overall pattern of partial adherence to the policy. Calories were not posted across all menu items on sale and not always displayed per standard portion/meal. There was lack of adherence to standardised recipes/portions and inaccurate calorie information.

Factors influencing implementation were related to the following:

- Internal hospital environment (e.g., perceived importance of calorie posting implementation)
- External hospital environment (e.g., national policy, monitoring)
- Features of the policy (e.g., availability of supporting materials)
- Implementation process (e.g., engaging relevant stakeholders)



Recommendations

The study findings point to the need for strategies at national and local level to maximise adherence to the policy. Key recommendations are as follows:

- Policy to provide **adequate documentation** of intervention components and activities involved e.g. an implementation plan/blueprint
- Ensure availability and awareness of, as well as access to, **supporting materials and training opportunities**
- Ensure adequate catering and dietetic **staffing levels**, and place **greater priority** on implementing interventions designed for staff health and well-being
- If **student engagement** is used to support implementation, intervention responsibility and accountability should be clear and training and supervision must be a priority
- Regular **monitoring and feedback** should be used to maximise stakeholder engagement and to contribute to successful implementation

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Access published study associated with this brief [here](#).

