Food and Hospitals: an historical perspective

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Hosted by the University of Birmingham (Brussels campus)
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Sponsored by the Society For Social History of Medicine

While contemporary grumblings about hospital food have become the quintessential hospital complaint, it is undeniable that a clean, warm bed, rest and the provision of food and drink, rather than medicines and therapies have always greatly increased hospital patients’ chances of recovery. Indeed diet has from the time of Galen been a central part of medical therapy. However, even if central to the day-to-day routine of hospitals, workhouses and asylums, food and drink continue to be overlooked in historical accounts of hospitalisation. This conference aims to foreground the role of food and drink in health care institutions in the past.

Food and drink were crucial to hospital and asylum expenditure from medieval to modern times, not unusually comprising one half of medical institutions’ annual budgets. Drink and diet naturally varied with country, region and locality. The organisers of this conference are interested in exploring broad geographical perspectives and associated fads, prejudices and phobias. The acquisition, preparation and use of foodstuffs were also managed by diverse groups, sometimes lay or clerical, as well as medical, including doctors, nurses and dieticians. Dietary needs and preferences of patients also varied with age, gender, race and religion, while meals were often augmented or restricted in line with diagnosis and discipline. Views concerning the role of food and drink in recovery also shifted significantly, both in earlier centuries, and more recently with the rise of the nutritional sciences.

The Advisory Board of the INHH, as organisers of this conference, wish to invite proposals for 25-30 minute papers on any aspect and era relating to the history of food, drink and institutional medicine. Abstracts should be between 200-300 words in length and will be received until 30 April 2012. A programme, featuring an address by Professor Peter Scholliers (VUB, Belgium), will be advertised in June 2012.
We welcome abstracts on any of the following themes:

1. **TREATMENT: DIET & MEDICINE**
   - **Theory**
     - The role of diet and medical theory
     - The psychology of food and food choice
     - Food as medicine; medicine as food
     - Food and religion: daily bread and the sin of gluttony
   - **Practice**
     - Dietary restrictions and punishments
     - Artificial and forced feeding
     - Alcohol and medical therapies
     - Water, wine and other dietary liquids
     - Nutrition and malnutrition
     - High diets, low diets and milk diets
     - Infant feeding and nutrition
     - Meat eaters versus vegetarians
     - Food for convalescence, weight gain and obesity

2. **SUPPLY**
   - The procurement and purchase of food
   - Waste, resistance and food smuggling
   - Hospital gardens, farms and work therapy
   - Food production and local economies
   - Theft of provisions and food crime
   - Food and philanthropy
   - Rationing, shortages and inequalities

3. **PREPARATION**
   - In-house preparation and distribution
   - Food for patients versus food for staff
   - Wells, vineyards and hospital breweries
   - Hospital kitchens and their technologies
   - Spaces of food preparation and consumption
   - Investigating quality and improving food

4. **FOOD AND DISEASE**
   - Food-related disorders and diseases
   - Hospital nutritionists and the science of food
   - Hospital medicine and food metaphors
   - Toxins, poisoning and contamination
   - Allergies, additives and adulteration
   - Hunger, starvation and famine

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