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Press release

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Potential for £6m improvements to hospital catering services

An Audit Scotland report on hospital catering has found that up to £6 million of the £55 million spent on hospital catering services each year could be released if procedures were tightened up and local policies on subsidies reviewed. This money could increase the average amount spent on patient food by up to 75p or pay for nutritional screening for patients.

The report estimates that £1.9 million could be released every year by better planning and reducing waste in hospital catering departments. At present wastage rates vary from 1% to 44% and the report recommends that all hospitals try to reduce it to 10%. Monitoring waste can help catering departments plan the number of patient meals needed more accurately and therefore reduce the amount of food cooked unnecessarily.

In addition hospitals spend £4.2 million subsidising non-patient meals, often without realising it. £2.1 million could be saved if hospitals just halved the subsidy levels for staff and visitors' meals. The report recommends that non-patient catering services should break even or trusts should have a clear policy on subsidies.

Ninety-two per cent of patients indicated that they were satisfied with hospital food. However the study found that a fifth of hospitals have no screening procedure in place to identify those who are at risk from malnutrition. It is best practice to screen patients on admission to hospital and without a standard procedure staff may not be alerted to nutritional problems. This may mean that patients miss out on specialist attention from dieticians and other healthcare professionals. The report recommends that all patients are properly screened on admission to hospital.

The Deputy Auditor General, Caroline Gardner says:

'It's good news that patients are generally satisfied with the food they receive in hospital. However we are concerned that some trusts are not screening patients' nutritional needs properly. The report identifies a number of savings which could be reinvested to improve nutritional care.'

The report highlights that the actual amount of money spent on patient meals varies between hospitals. It found that some hospitals spent as little as £1.25 per patient per day, while others had £3 to spend. The full £6 million saving identified could increase these amounts by as much 75p per patient per day.

For further information or to arrange interviews contact: Katie Fleming on 0131 624 9970 or James Gillies 0131 624 9971

Notes for editors

1. The Auditor General is responsible for securing the audit of the Scottish Executive and most other public bodies in Scotland, except local authorities. He investigates whether spending bodies achieve the best possible value for money and adhere to the highest standards of financial management. The Auditor General is independent and is not subject to the control of the Scottish Executive or the Scottish Parliament.
2. Audit Scotland is a statutory body set up in April 2000, under the Public Finance and Accountability (Scotland) Act, 2000. It provides services to the Auditor General for Scotland and the Accounts Commission.
3. The findings and recommendations in this report will be followed up by Audit Scotland on behalf of the Auditor General in due course. In carrying out this study Audit Scotland reviewed twenty six NHS bodies including trusts, island NHS boards and the State Hospital, and forty one hospital sites.