

FOI REF: 26/065

18th February 2026

Tel: 0300 131 4500
Website: www.esht.nhs.uk

Further to your recent request for information made under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) 2000, I now set out our answers to your specific questions, and any clarifications sought and provided, as follows:

Mealtime support, nutrition and dignity

(Dining companions / Mealtime Support Schemes / feeding support)

1. Mealtime support roles

Does the Trust operate any formal or informal mealtime support schemes (for example dining companions, mealtime mates, feeding assistants or volunteer mealtime support)?

Yes.

If yes, please describe:

- **the role(s) involved, and**
- **whether they are undertaken by staff, volunteers, or both.**

Assistance is provided by clinical staff including nurses, allied health care professional and clinical support workers. We also encourage patient's family or carers to support with meal and drink preferences and with eating and drinking.

Patients with cognitive impairment due to dementia or learning disabilities for example may also have specific individualised care plans developed with partners in their care to fully inform ward staff of patients' needs where they may not be able to communicate this effectively.

Cont.../

2. Scope of provision

During 2024/25, in which settings are mealtime support roles provided?

- **all adult inpatient wards**

Any wards could potentially treat patients requiring assistance not limited to stroke and elderly or dementia patients.

- **selected wards only**

Please see above.

- **specific patient groups (e.g. older people, frailty, stroke, dementia)**

Please see above.

3. Training and competency

Please describe any training, guidance or competency frameworks used for staff or volunteers involved in supporting patients at mealtimes (for example dignity, feeding assistance, recognising swallowing difficulties).

We do have Dysphagia Training L1 and L2 available which covers theory and practical aspects of how to help a person with swallowing difficulties.

4. Nutrition and hydration initiatives

Please list any initiatives in place during 2024/25 aimed at improving:

- **nutrition intake**
- **hydration**
- **assistance with eating and drinking particularly for patients who may need extra support.**

In March 2025, the Trust held its annual Nutrition and Hydration week with various initiatives to improve awareness of this topic. These included visiting wards to train staff and offer smoothies, taking part in the World Tea Party and promoting new initiatives such as the Biozoon. We are currently working on our adapted cutlery and crockery availability to improve how we manage this.

5. Patient dignity at mealtimes

Has the Trust introduced any actions during 2024/25 to improve privacy, dignity or companionship during mealtimes?

Yes.

If yes, please describe the actions taken.

The Trust is currently rewriting its Protected mealtimes policy and changing this to an Assisted Mealtimes Policy.

6. Measuring effectiveness

How does the Trust measure the effectiveness of mealtime support initiatives? (For example: patient feedback, nutrition audits, complaints themes, hydration monitoring, PLACE assessments.)

Generally monitored via comments made at the point of service. We do respond and action where possible all complaints that are made via the PALS team.

I trust this information is helpful in its detail or explanation however, if you are dissatisfied with the response, then you have the right to request an internal review. If you wish to seek an internal review, please write to the Freedom of Information Team at esh-tr.foi@nhs.net quoting the above FOI reference number, within 40 working days. Please note the Trust is not obliged to accept a request for an internal review after this time period.

Yours faithfully,

Freedom of Information (FOI) Team
East Sussex Healthcare NHS Trust
0300 131 4716
Core Hours of Business: Monday to Friday 9.00am to 4.00pm