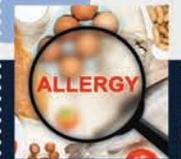# This Isn't What I Ordered: The Severity of Hospital Tray Delivery Inaccuracy

What Can Be Done To Keep Patients Safe and Satisfied During Their Stay

Table of Contents

Hospitals Help Individuals, Right?

At one point or another I'm sure we all have visited a hospital. Whether for a routine checkup, special test or surgery, it's fair to assume that hospitals are the place we go when we need medical attention.

However, they can also be a place for potential errors. While done unintentionally of course, human error does occur and unfortunately can impact an individual's well-being, especially in a hospital setting.

> *"A third of all hospital admissions results in harm to a patient."*

According to a study done by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), up to a third of all hospital admissions result in harm to a patient.[1] Meaning one out of three individuals who go into a facility with the hope of improving their health, actually experience issues that affect it more - which is the opposite of a hospital's intention. What's worse, in the same study, researchers also found that about 180,000 Medicare beneficiaries die every year from accidents and errors.

While the severity of these incidents vary, preventable errors happen more often than we think and not only pose a danger to patients, but also create unnecessary costs for hospitals. Such instances like severe infections from surgical equipment left in a body to drug-related injuries because of transcription errors, if taken to court, could potentially result in hospitals paying almost half a million dollars or more in a malpractice settlement.[2]

Dietary Errors Are Also Great Risks In Hospitals

Foodservice can also affect patient safety and is a greater threat than hospital risk managers realize. According to FARE (Food Allergy Research & Education), 15 million Americans have food allergies and most reactions happen when food was thought to be safe.[3] If you also consider a hospital environment, where other dietary restrictions are in place and meal trays pass through multiple hands, from ticket creation to tray delivery, the potential for error and harm to a patient is high.

Do Tray Errors Really Happen That Often?

In a study done by the Pennsylvania Patient Safety Authority (PPSA), analysts identified 285 events involving dietary errors that ranged from allergens on a tray to NPO patients receiving meals prior to a surgery. Of the 285 errors, almost two-thirds of them were allergy-related and a majority of those allergies were both known and documented in health records. Some of the individuals exposed

181 were allergens on the tray **(63.5%)**
77.9% of those trays were both known and documented in medical records
8 of the 181 patients suffered **serious harm**

50 were patients who received the **wrong diet** **(17.5%)**

43 were meals meant for **other patients** **(15.09%)**

11 were meals delivered to **NPO patients** **(3.85%)**

to those allergens even suffered serious harm from anaphylaxis.[4] Meaning emergency administration of medicine, intubation and/or transfer to the ICU.

So how could this happen? Especially when hospitals reference health records as a precautionary measure to prevent these exact errors from occurring?

Often times it's minor mistakes that regrettably have major implications on patients. For example, two noted breakdowns found in the study were from staff incorrectly writing a fruit allergy in the section for drug allergies and charting a seafood allergy as a "seawater" allergy.

It's More Than Allergies

While allergy conflicts are the most common and obvious dietary error in hospitals, the PPSA study also highlighted other issues that arose, like patients receiving the wrong diet, trays that were delivered to the wrong person and NPO patients eating a meal mistakenly given to them. All of which had their own set of severe consequences.

For instance, patients who are diabetic and eat a low-carb diet or have heart issues and need low-sodium food rely heavily on tray delivery accuracy. Receiving the wrong meal could very well be a matter of life or death. Things like uncontrollable blood sugar levels and increased blood pressure, which are common side effects of eating restricted foods, could cause sickness, heart failure and other serious illness. Not to mention, impact their ability to recover, possibly prolong their stay and create an overall unpleasant experience while in your facility.

Additionally, in cases where NPO patients were fed an inappropriate meal and subsequently missed tests or surgeries, issues were more than just lost opportunities to better their health. Incurred costs due to empty operating rooms and rescheduling tests/surgeries without proper notice were also repercussions of mistakes made. And hefty repercussions at that, as procedures can vary from $30/min to $80/min. Factoring in staff and time, total costs could be anywhere from $3,500 - $10,000 per incident.[5]

Impacting The Patient Experience

Handling tray delivery with proper care and attention is crucial, not only for patient safety, but also for maintaining and increasing satisfaction scores in hospitals.

When food is the wrong temperature, takes longer than expected to arrive or simply gets lost, as in any other foodservice environment, people can get upset. However, combine those inconveniences with discomfort felt from illness and the result is extremely dissatisfied patients - which translates into low satisfaction scores, negative feedback on surveys, and missing out on government reimbursements.

Think about that dreaded question all Nutrition Services staff hope to avoid hearing.

"Where is my tray?"

What can make the situation worse is if the answer to that question is, *"I'm not sure."*

> *"When patients feel they can't trust a hospital's ability to take care of their needs, the likelihood of them returning for future assistance decreases signifantly."*

While lost and reordered trays are a definite strain on resources and create more unnecessary costs for hospitals, the inability to locate a tray, especially in front of a patient, highlights a larger issue within a foodservice operation. What's more, these continued issues also create a severe lack of trust, and when patients feel they can't trust a hospital's ability to take care of their needs, the likelihood of them returning for future assistance decreases significantly.

Moreover, because the world has shifted towards trusting ratings and reviews in the consumer/customer service process, all it takes is one dissatisfied individual to tell a family member or friend about their bad experience and a hospital's reputation is impacted.

How Can Tray Tracking Software Act As A Safeguard For Hospitals?

From meal selection and ticket creation to tray assembly and delivery, there are many aspects to consider in the tray delivery process and every point has potential for error. Thus, having accountability at each step is *essential*.

What can prevent hospitals from making mistakes and keep patients safe *(and satisfied!)* is implementing **tray tracking software**.

Automating the tray tracking process provides hospital staff with a safeguard to ensure accurate tray delivery, especially in cases where patients may have a change in their diet after ordering a meal. Additionally, helpful features like wristband verification and warning messages using hand-held technology, add extra, real-time security to further avoid mistakes. Having this advanced tech available to staff on the floors, especially fully integrated with a diet office software solution already in place, not only catches errors before incidents occur, but also guarantees that patients receive the right food in a timely manner. Thereby preventing individuals from going without food altogether.

Tray tracking software can also improve operational efficiency through detailed reporting. By having extensive data on-hand, Nutrition Services teams can reference tray delivery and wristband scanning history to track and benchmark individual and shift delivery times to see areas of improvement, along with reward staff who meet their set goals. Meaning a stronger, more motivated staff that will not only improve operations, but enhance the overall foodservice atmosphere for the benefit of all patients. In addition, studies show that higher patient satisfaction levels are typically achieved at facilities with more positive work environments for their staff.[6]

Furthermore, automating also decreases costs and food waste, in addition to increasing patient satisfaction by enhancing tray location tracking. In providing real-time tray delivery information to nutrition service staff, never again will a staff member say, "I'm not sure." when a patient asks, "where is my tray?" With a few scans and clicks, they'll know right away. And more importantly, they'll know it's the right tray.

Is Your Facility As Safe As Possible?

Dr. Lucian Leape, cofounder of the National Patient Safety Foundation and current professor at Harvard School of Public Health, says it best, *"The hospitals that are transforming health care put patient safety above all."*

While there are multiple factors that do contribute to hospitals outranking others, especially in terms of patient experience, aspects like implementing new technology and improving foodservice operations need to be done with one goal in mind – to keep patients as safe as possible during their stay. With that being said, assessing current policies and procedures is a great place to start to see what can be enhanced and where new patient safety initiatives can be incorporated into the foodservice department workflow. From there, integrating software that can track and automate the tray delivery process will not only ensure patients stay safe, but that they continue on the road to recovery while under your care.

Automate Today!

If you're ready to put patient safety at the forefront of your department and standout as one of the top-ranking hospitals, automate the tray delivery process today - *and make sure it's not just any tray tracking software either.*

When choosing the right solution, consider one that fully integrates with your current foodservice and nutrition services software solution. The last thing you want is to implement a product that adds more stress to your department, rather than alleviates it. Also, make sure that the solution you choose displays alerts and warning messages that are simple and easy-to-see. It will not only prevent errors on the spot but keep the fast-paced tray delivery process moving efficiently.

Another must for any tray tracking software solution is integration with bedside ordering software. If you think about it, trays need to be ordered first before they are delivered to patients. Having the two processes connected helps foodservice departments run smoother and allows more genuine patient-staff interaction. With the right software in place, nutrition staff wont have to worry about tray location or figure out how to order a new tray, they'll have the tools to ensure their patients receive the right meal.

So choose wisely! If done right, you'll see a shift in both the patient and employee experience, which creates a more positive, better-connected environment for everyone involved.

About Computrition

Since its inception in 1980, Computrition's core objective has been to provide industry-leading, comprehensive software solutions to support food and nutrition professionals and to promote the quality, efficiency and safety of their operations in the healthcare industry.

Our flagship solution, Hospitality Suite, is a powerful automation system that is being used by customers to decrease costs, improve revenue, and increase patient satisfaction.

Computrition is based out of Los Angeles, California with satellite offices throughout the United States and Canada. We are composed of dietitians, former foodservice directors, IT professionals, and former clients who understand the needs of our customer base. In short, we know what you are looking for in a healthcare foodservice software system because we are a company of professionals who are just like you.

We offer automated solutions for the following:

- Foodservice
- Nutrition Service
- Point-of-Sale
- Room Service
- Tray Tracking
- Floor Stocking
- Employee Account Management
- Touch Screen Menu

- Selections
- TV Meal Ordering
- Web Recipes and Web Menus
- Food Labeling
- Bedside Meal Ordering via Mobile Device
- Call Center

Call us at (800) 222-4488 or go to http://www.computrition.com/contact-us to find out more about our solutions.

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- Case Studies: http://www.computrition.com/read-our-case-studies

- White Paper: http://www.computrition.com/white-paper

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