The top 3 requirements in modern kitchen management.
Did you get them right?

The requirements of modern catering management in social care and healthcare establishments are growing rapidly. The first duty for every kitchen in the healthcare industry is to contribute to the welfare of patients and residents.

Mornings in the hospital kitchen start early with a meeting attended by all employees, to arrange the schedule. Over the first cup of coffee of the day, the tasks are distributed amongst the colleagues. Right after that, the whole team works together to make breakfast for the patients. Most importantly, the individual requirements and needs of every patient are taken into account. This ensures that patients with allergies (e.g. against cow’s milk, eggs or nuts), intolerances such as fructose, lactose or gluten or difficulties chewing or swallowing receive the meal that is specifically suited to their diet.

Challenges that are not to be underestimated.

Challenge 1 - provision of different forms of food

More and more people rely on special forms of nutrition due to illness, age or a certain medical need. One of the main tasks in the kitchens of healthcare establishments is to take this into account thus supporting the best possible recovery process.

Irrespective of medical and dietary aspects, the special challenge for chefs is to provide all patients with the necessary nutrients. For many patients, mealtimes are the biggest and only highlight of the day and a welcome change from the repetitive routine.

Challenge 2 – food safety

Maintaining hygiene and work safety standards in the kitchen is especially important – and not just in healthcare. Everything needs to be fully documented – from incoming goods to the cooking and serving temperature. Many patients are weakened by a damaged immune system and are very sensitive to external influences. Everything therefore needs to work flawlessly. Every single step must be documented precisely. This begins from food and product planning, food purchasing and storage and stretches to the preparation, production and picking. The entire logistics, portioning and food service must also be recorded. Of course this process is completed by the data on washing and cleaning the kitchen. A modern networking and documentation solution can simplify this process significantly in the future.
Challenge 3 – quality assurance

The third major aspect which plays a crucial role in hospitals and retirement homes is the meal quality. In many organisations, quality stands within an area of conflict between increasing efficiency, cost and time pressure on the one hand, and employee motivation and know how on the other. Freshly served dishes and a wider choice are particularly important for healthcare establishments, according to a study on “Catering in healthcare” conducted by the market research institution Lünendonk in 2017.

Private patients have special demands, “à la carte dining” is a trend, which features more and more, especially when it comes to satisfying this customer group. Studies show that catering for private patients plays a part that must not be underestimated. For the kitchen, this means paying particular attention to organisation and flexibility.

Catering logistics through the ages

Nothing new? Then the only way is to draw the right conclusions in order to ensure the kitchen and the menu remain competitive.

Stronger technological support is an important starting point. This eliminates problematic process steps and helps assure quality. Continuously recurring processes that are typical in kitchens can be simplified significantly thanks to automation, and can above all be standardised. At the same time, the desire for more individualised nutrition is increasing. To improve efficiency automated production approaches are recommended, however the use of new technologies also requires additional employee training in order to get the best out of the new innovations.

Another way is third party support, even if today the majority of healthcare establishments still do their own catering, there has been a trend towards outsourced supply solutions in recent years. Kitchens which were until recently used for cooking are increasingly turning into distribution centres for meals supplied by an external catering company, often with the same or even better quality. All kinds of processes and cooking methods such as cook & chill, sous-vide or cook & freeze guarantee stable food quality. The distribution kitchens would then either portion and regenerate the food or they would use a fully plated solution from a cook & chill production kitchen, with the help of a food distribution system. An alternative to modernisation or kitchen remodelling? Only a close observation of investment and subsequent costs will help here.

Ultimately, the customer is the crucial factor and the focus is always on patient satisfaction. This is the crucial criterion which successful and future-oriented hospitals and retirement homes must keep in mind.

Kitchens need to manage the daily balancing act between cost efficiency on the one hand, and the welfare of patients on the other. This is the requirement chefs today need to meet, which is also a major organisational challenge for them.
With over 40 years of experience in hot food preparation, RATIONAL understands very well the special requirements for modern kitchen management in healthcare as a result of countless customer projects.

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RATIONAL is able to respond to individual needs very flexibly with the intelligent system solution iKitchen, with the multifunctional cooking appliance VarioCookingCenter®, the SelfCookingCenter® and the network solution ConnectedCooking. The cooking systems of RATIONAL clearly support simple and healthy food production. Thanks to ConnectedCooking, you can record all HACCP data concerning the cooking process fully automatically and ensure flawless documentation.

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