

**DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES**  
**Health Care Financing Administration**

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Region VI  
1301 Young Street, Room 833  
Dallas, Texas 75202

March 23, 1998

REGIONAL SURVEY AND CERTIFICATION LETTER NO: 98-01

To: All State Survey Agencies (Action)  
All Title XVIII Single State Agencies (Action)

Subject: The Surveyors Use of Test Trays in Long Term (LTCs)  
Nursing Facilities and Pureed Diets in LTCs

This letter discusses two questions which are frequently asked. The first is: When can surveyors in LTCs facilities request test trays?

Answer: The 42 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) sections 483.35(d) (1) (2) requires that the food service furnish: "food that is palatable, attractive and at the proper temperature." Although page 30 of the *Survey Procedures For Long Term Care Facilities, Revision 274* specifically mentions that residents' complaints about the foods' temperatures may prompt the team leader to ask for a test tray, this does not mean a test tray can only be requested if there are complaints. **Surveyors may ask for a test tray whenever there is a reason to suspect that foods may be being delivered to residents at temperatures which are unpalatable and/or inappropriate. The request may be based on residents' complaints and/or observations made by the surveyor/s.**

For example, a surveyor monitoring the care furnished in an Alzheimers' unit observed that it took the nursing aides approximately 45 minutes to deliver the lunch trays. The surveyor also noted that when aides opened the ice cream cups, the ice cream appeared melted. None of the residents on the Alzheimer's unit complained about their food. However, based on her observations the surveyor re~requested a test tray for the next lunch meal. When she took the food temperatures she found the whole meat item was 80 degrees Fahrenheit, the milk was 100 degrees Fahrenheit, the pureed meat was 95 degrees Fahrenheit, and the mashed potatoes were 102 degrees Fahrenheit. The surveyor interviewed the aides delivering the trays. The aides indicated the ice cream is always melted by the time they delivery the tray to the last resident. The aides also stated many of the residents will not eat the ice cream when it is melted. Based on the temperatures of the food items, the information obtained from the aides during the interviews, and her observations, the surveyor would be able to cite a deficiency at 483.35(d) (1) (2)

The second set of questions addressed in this letter is. Does the pureed diet have to include a variety of food items? Is it acceptable for the pureed diet to have mashed potatoes on the menu daily and/or use mashed potatoes as a substitute daily?

Answer: It is standard practice in institutional food services for menus to contain a variety of food items. It is not acceptable for the pureed diet to have mashed potatoes on the menu for lunch and supper on a daily basis. Nor is it permissible for mashed potatoes to be used as the substitute food item at lunch and supper every day. The menus for all of the diets should contain a variety of foods rotated as needed to meet the residents' nutritional needs and taste preferences. If a nursing home's menu indicates the pureed diet contains the food items on the regular diet in pureed form, then that is what should be served. 42 CFR 483.35© indicates that the menus must meet the nutritional needs of the residents, be prepared in advance, **and be followed** . Although there are occasions when it is necessary to substitute a food item, it is not acceptable to have the same substitute items used over and over to the point that the residents no longer receive a variety of food choices. It is important when reviewing menus and

food substitution lists that surveyors look at the nutritional content of the diet and interview residents and family members to ensure that the residents' taste preferences and cultural needs are met. Whenever there are questions about menu adequacy and appropriateness the survey team should refer the concerns to their dietitian.

If you have any questions concerning this letter, please contact Karen Herbelin, a member of the staff, at (214) 767-4422.

Sincerely,

(Signature)

Calvin Cline, Branch Chief  
Survey and Certification Operations Branch