Investigating nutritional adequacy and patient satisfaction of the free fluids diet at Cabrini Malvern

Background

In the gastrointestinal setting, the free fluids diet is prescribed as a post-operative transitional diet, towards a regular diet. The free fluids diet is a restrictive diet (fluids and fluid based foods only), commonly associated with patient dissatisfaction.

Internationally-endorsed evidence-based Enhanced Recovery After Surgery (ERAS®) guidelines, recommend the early introduction of solid food to increase recovery, decrease complications, and reduce length of stay.

Aims

1. To investigate the nutritional adequacy of the free fluid diet at Cabrini Malvern.

2. To investigate patient satisfaction of the free fluid diet at Cabrini Malvern.

Method

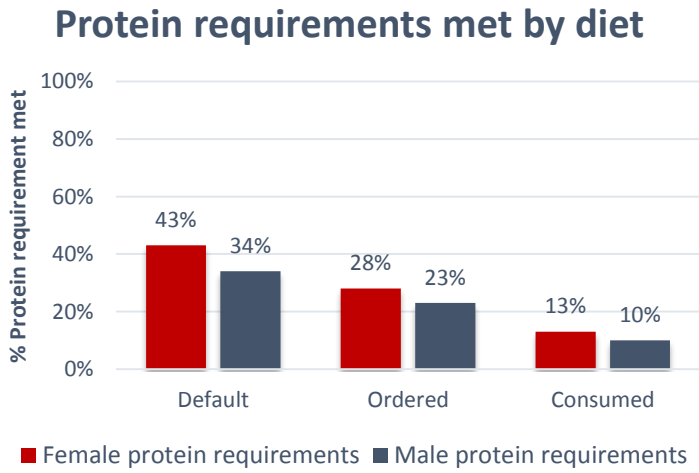
A 15 day cross-sectional study.

1. Nutritional analysis (Foodworks software) and comparison of:
   - 1.1 Default free fluid meals (n=3)
   - 1.2 Patient ordered free fluid meals (n=17)
   - 1.3 Patient consumed meals (n=14)

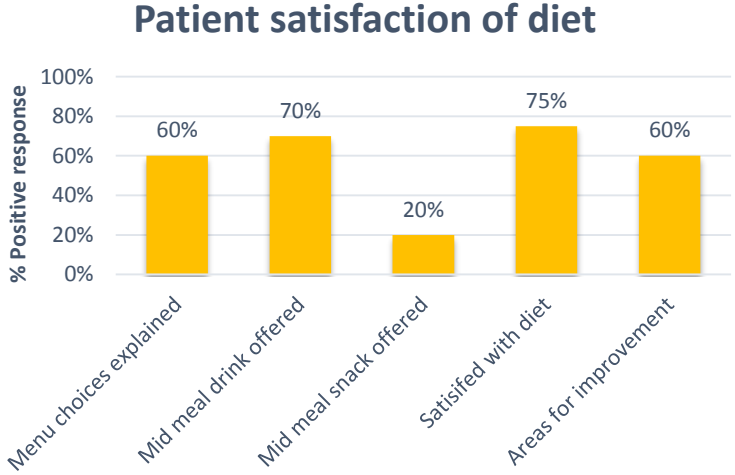
2. Patient survey (n=20) addressing time spent on diet, understanding of diet, dietary choice and overall satisfaction (5 point Likert scale).

Results

1. Patients did not meet energy or protein requirements, consuming 13-16% of energy and 10-13% of protein requirements at main meals.



2. Despite being on the diet from 1-5 days, 75% of patients were satisfied or very satisfied with the free fluids diet. However, 80% of patients were not offered mid-meal snacks and 60% suggested areas for improvement.



Conclusion

The free fluids diet is a nutritionally inadequate diet that may impact on the patient experience. Implementation of a protocol in line with the Enhanced Recovery After Surgery (ERAS®) guidelines is recommended to limit time spent on restrictive diets, to support patient recovery and minimise risk of malnutrition.

Acknowledgments
Jessica McArdle and Katherine Muller, Master of Nutrition and Dietetics students, La Trobe University

Reference

ERAS Society (2016). *ERAS Guidelines*. Retrieved from http://erassociety.org.loopiadns.com/guidelines/list-of-guidelines/

Bek Anderson, Food Service Dietitian, Cabrini Health
banderson@cabrini.com.au