AIMS For a better birth...

What's On The Menu?

By Fiona Campbell Smith

AIMS Journal, 1998, Vol 10, No 4

With tongue firmly in cheek, AIMS takes a look at the menu mentality of modern maternity care and the complete myth of 'choice'.

Looking for a business opportunity which would guarantee success, I decided to follow the example set by maternity services and *increase safety* in the normal physiological activity of eating. I call my restaurant "Pasta, Dates and Lettuce in Juice" and hopefully I will soon see it expand into a chain of similar establishments throughout the country.

Eating is an essential part of life and our bodies are superbly designed for the process but disasters do occur, the most obvious being choking on a piece of food. Is your epiglottis 100% reliable? Although such incidents are rare, I consider it essential that full emergency resources be available to al1 dining individuals. I suggest that you make use of my facilities for those special meals in your life; birthdays, anniversaries, etc. The times when you are just not prepared to take the slightest chance of anything going wrong. So come along, sit well back in my gastronomically designed, almost horizontal chairs and enjoy total safety.

The figures speak for themselves. Last year almost one fifth of customers realised with gratitude that they were saved from certain death, by my investment in highly trained staff and high tech cutlery.

On making a reservation for dinner, a range of simple tests will be carried out, to establish the best time for you to dine. You will be required to give a detailed history of your eating habits in the preceding 24 hours. Of course you may be so greedy and irresponsible that you are prepared to lie or you may be unable to remember. Appetite alone is a very blunt instrument in meal planning, therefore, an ultrasound scan of your stomach and some routine blood tests, will be carried out to allow precision timing of your meal and also to help guide you in choosing from the menu.

During your meal, continuos monitoring of several body processes will be carried out. This is entirely routine and include observation of vital signs, e.g., pulse, temperature and blood pressure. You will also benefit from my external throat monitor which can detect (even a tendency to) choking at the earliest indication. A small number of clients have reported feelings of nausea and even a choking sensation which they have associated with the use of this type of monitor. I must reassure any potential clients that there is no evidence to support these concerns and there will always be some individuals who are more sensitive than others. However, customer satisfaction is very important, so in response to client*feedback*,

I am currently working on an internal cheek monitor which clients have indicated would be less restrictive. In the meantime, anti-emetic and anxiety relieving drugs are always on the menu.

Emergencies can arise without warning, for example, anaphylactic shock: a severe, life threatening, allergic reaction, often seen as a result of eating shellfish or nuts. We do not, therefore feature these dishes on our menu. I regret to say that very occasionally, irresponsible diners have brought in packets of peanuts, a significant cause of both choking and allergic reactions. For this reason all diners will have an intravenous infusion set up. This represents a super safe, luxury extra for which no added charge will be made.

The time taken to consume a meal varies widely amongst individuals and having considered all factors such as maximum profit from efficient use of tables and the advantage to customers in knowing how long their meal will take, I have devised the following timetable.

Starter

This is the most flexible course and indeed because of the reduced risks of consuming a small portion of food (prawn cocktails excepted) you may decide to eat your appetiser at home.

Main Course

A maximum of one hour will be allowed for first time customers. More experienced diners will normally require no more than 30 minutes.

Dessert

Any expert will tell you that no meal is over until the pudding plates are cleared away and in order to keep up to speed with expert thinking, your pudding plate will be removed after three minutes, whether you have eaten it or not. The three minutes will begin as soon as you have finished your main course. You will almost certainly require a small injection of appetite stimulant to complete your dessert within the allocated time.

Some diners may fail to progress at the required rate but help will be at hand in the form of nasogastric feeding. Some critics have unfairly described this necessary assistance as force feeding, when in fact it is correctly termed, augmentation of nutrition. Anyone who is struggling to cope with the final few mouthfuls will be advised to take advantage of instrumental delivery of food. i.e. your remaining food will be fed to you in one large mouthful. If necessary and only then, we may increase the size of your mouth by making a small incision, called "Easi-peasi-otomy"'. You will not feel any pain, only relief on finally seeing in front of you, a clean plate.

All tables are for two people but by special arrangement two tables may be pushed together to cater for larger groups. My aim is to provide one waitress for each table but at times of peak demand, it is sometimes necessary for each waitress to attend up to six tables. No matter how busy we are, your meal will never be delayed. In fact, thanks to my commitment to customer service, your meal may even be

slightly undercooked. Should this occur, your waitress will immediately (before you even see it) take your plate back to the kitchen for special incu-baking.

Training at all levels is continuous and essential to consistent quality treatment, therefore I feel confident that you will agree to catering students (any number of) closely scrutinising your eating habits. Please do not worry if a student has to check progress by sticking his/her fingers down your throat. It is important that you do not swallow during these examinations, no matter how irresistible the urge.

You may prefer a table in a quiet, candlelit corner especially if you are a little in awe of our high tech safety equipment. You can be reassured that all tables are equally safe and attractive but in the "Cosy Corners" I have hidden the clinical equipment underneath the colour co-ordinated table linen. Every evening, a prize is awarded to our "Diner of the Day": A year's supply of "After Ates" from the Prozac selection.

We do not offer Take-Away or Home Delivery services.

Some eccentric people will continue to take the risk of dining at home or in small local establishments but ask yourself this - Which is more important - Perfect nutritional provision in a state of the art safety area or enjoying your food? *Bon Appetit.*