

Addressing increasing obesity rates of UK children is a priority. The wider food environment should be designed so that the 'healthier choice' is the easiest choice; this includes public sector settings such as hospitals. Many hospital outlets sell and promote food and drinks high in sugar, fat and salt undermining health messages developed by the NHS. Financial incentives have been provided to encourage hospitals to promote healthier food choices; however few outlets have complied with set targets.

This qualitative interview study aimed to determine the dietary perceptions and needs of parents whose children attend a large children's hospital in the North East of England and to discern potential barriers and facilitators to eating healthily in a hospital setting.

Eighteen parents of children attending the hospital as an in- or out-patient were recruited to participate in a one-to-one in-depth interview. Parents reported a lack of affordable healthy options for sale both for themselves and visiting children. Although parents wanted to see more healthy options available for sale they did not feel it was appropriate to ban or restrict sales of any food types. Parents of frequent or long-term in-patients found it difficult to feed themselves.

The ways in which visitors and staff can be encouraged to choose the healthier option in an NHS hospital setting warrants further investigation. The use of 'nudge theory', which has gained particular momentum in areas such as health promotion, may be a tool which can be utilised by hospitals to facilitate the promotion of healthy eating.