



COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA
DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WELFARE

WESTERN STATE SCHOOL AND HOSPITAL

333 Curry Hill Road
Canonsburg, Pennsylvania 15317

January 30, 1975

ROBERT J. HILTNER, ACSW
SUPERINTENDENT

TELEPHONE
AREA CODE 412, 745-0700

Mr. Robert Nelkin
Associate Executive Director
1001 Brighton Road
Pittsburgh, PA 15233

Dear Bob:

I have been trying to think for several days of the best way to phrase my response to your letter of January 6, 1975. Let me say at the outset that I was also very concerned about the way Mrs. Webb phrased her responses to questions put to her at the December 19, 1974 Liaison Committee meeting. I have, since that meeting, had several conversations with Mrs. Webb and anticipate that there will have to be several more before the current problems in the Dietary Department are resolved.

Your letter focuses on who gave various instructions to Mrs. Webb. In discussions with Mrs. Webb it has become apparent that more important than specifically "who" are the rather considerable communication problems and confusion in lines of accountability and authority that are revealed when the question of "who" is explored. Let me say that the "who" in most cases turns out to be Child Care Aides who have been very vocal in their criticism of the Dietary Department. The instructions, it appears, were not instructions, but rather complaints to Mrs. Webb and other Dietary staff to which the Dietary Department attempted to respond, at times inappropriately. The first of your questions is a good example of how some of these things come about. It is "folklore" that fresh fruit and vegetables cause diarrhea. This erroneous belief is held by many Child Care Aides who are quite naturally, on unstaffed total care units, quite concerned with the frequency of diaper changes. For this reason, many complaints have been sent to Dietary about fresh fruits and vegetables. It is reported that on a few occasions hard-pressed CCA's angry about lack of staff have refused to feed fresh fruits and vegetables to total care residents. It is because of these angry complaints that Mrs. Webb has been hesitant to serve fresh fruits and vegetables frequently.

It has been made clear to Mrs. Webb that she is the dietetic expert and that in such matters as types of foods to be served she should stand her ground. Further, efforts are being made through the Nursing Department for more supervision of feeding to assure that "folklore" will not dictate what is served and not served and to provide
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in-service training to CCA's on Dietary matters.

Your second question goes to the heart of another problem; that is, the lack of clear definitions of what constitutes requirements for different types of food consistency diets. The french fries incident appears to have been also prompted by a panic reaction on the part of Dietary and other staff following the death of Paul Jenkins. At that point, many people responded to the choking death as though the way to prevent similar incidents was to be sure everything was chopped as fine as possible. In order to correct previous laxities and in order to avoid excesses born of panic or over concern the following steps have been taken: (1) the residence area physician and nurse have reviewed all diet orders, and (2) tighter procedures for regular reviews of diets are being written for the Dietary, Nursing and Medical Departments. Another step must also be completed; that is, a generally agreed upon set of definitions of what constitutes various types of consistency diets. The types of foods that are acceptable in each diet and the type of resident requiring each diet must be agreed upon between the Dietary, Nursing, and Medical Department. To accomplish this we have initiated a series of meetings with the Administrative Committee (the Superintendent and Assistant Superintendents) and Mrs. Webb and Mrs. Porcaro.

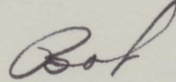
The answer to your third and fourth questions, eg. the pulverizing of oranges and the reduction in the consistency of diets is similar to the answer to the above question. In part, some of these actions were the result of over reactions to the death of Paul Jenkins; some diets may have been reduced as the result of the review of diets.

In short, it is apparent that Mrs. Webb has felt defensive about the operations of the Dietary Department. In part, this defensiveness has resulted from factors over which Mrs. Webb had limited control; for example, a much greater than normal turnover in personnel in the Dietary Department in the past year, slow downs in replacement of personnel because of a Regional Office freeze on non-direct care personnel, and a large number of new staff unfamiliar with Dietary procedures (eg. only one of our present seven cooks has been in the job for more than one year). Further, Mrs. Webb has both felt that she has not had administrative backing to take stands on issues such as the vegetables and has been reluctant to make use of administrative channels that did exist. Finally, it is apparent that to far too great an extent the Dietary Department has tended to operate in isolation from treatment and habilitation services. There has been at best insufficient communication between such departments as Nursing and the leadership of the Dietary Department. Where such communication has taken place, it has been on a reactive rather than interactive basis.

In the few months since November, there has been a good deal of discussion, review, and investigation of the Dietary Department

from both outside and inside Western. I believe that the nature and definition of the problems are becoming clearer to everyone involved and answers are beginning to emerge. I can assure you that we will continue to pursue the problem of Dietary Services until these services are services that we can be proud of.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Bob", written in a cursive style.

Robert J. Hiltner
Superintendent

RJH:mc

cc: Dr. and Mrs. Goldberg
Mr. C. A. Peters
Mrs. E. Webb
Mr. J. Levinson
Dr. R. L. Scott