

Investigating the Role of Meal Quality and Food Look, Smell, and Taste on Perceived Health Improvement for Clients of Meals on Wheels of Central Indiana

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Meals on Wheels organizations across the country have the common goal of ending hunger among the elderly, malnourished, and disabled population. Meals on Wheels of Central Indiana (MOWCI) primarily serves Marion County and the rest of the state through one of its programs. The organization offers daily hot and cold meals Monday through Friday, frozen meal deliveries, and pantry boxes. Minus the pantry boxes, meals are assembled at one of nine participating health corporations: Community Health Network, Eskenazi Health, IU Health- Methodist, Marquette, Franciscan Health, Ascension St. Vincent, and Westminster Village. MOWCI offers traditional or Medicaid subsidized hot and cold meals (for Marion County clients), Ryan's Meals for Life (HIV/AIDS clients), and Embrace Cancer programs (low-income cancer treatment clients from Eskenazi). In this study, phone surveys were conducted investigating food quality and delivery satisfaction for daily hot and cold clients (n=149). Results were analyzed in Excel using a Chi-Square analysis of independence (alpha 0.05, 3 degrees of freedom). It was found that overall food quality and food smell, taste, and appearance were associated with perceived health improvements in a significantly significant manner with a p-value of 0.0000113 and 0.0198 respectively. There are 248 clients who as of July 7th have not been evaluated and thus, is still an active area of focus for MOWCI. A model has been created and shared with the organization that continues to allow them to collect data on future clients and input the data in order to determine what effect meals have on all of their client population as opposed to the 37.5% of clients that have been evaluated in this project. These efforts will be used in the future to aid in writing grants to allow for the expansion of current and future programs.