

Danger: Jam sponge

Cakes the ladies of the WI bake for patients are banned by hospital as a potential health hazard



WI members in Radwinter, Essex, whose cakes have been banned

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WI members in Radwinter, Essex, whose cakes have been banned

By James Mills

THINK of cakes and you probably think of the Women's Institute. They go together like - well, jam and sponge.

With elderly patients at a hospital in Essex, the freshly-baked Victoria sandwiches, tarts and fruit cakes brought in by the WI once a month certainly went down well.

But the teatime treat has been banned by officials at Saffron Walden Community Hospital - who have branded the cakes a potential health hazard.

They claim they breach guidelines because the kitchens of the WI members have not been inspected.

Not surprisingly, at a time when hospital superbugs are claiming up to 20,000 lives a year, angry



Warding off confectionery: Saffron Walden Community Hospital

members of the WI are boiling like a pan of jam. 'Who ever died from eating a jam tart or a Victoria sandwich?' said 62-year-old retired teacher Sue Bright, who specialises in jam sponges.

'The poor patients will probably have to eat biscuits now instead.'

Glynis Straker, a mother of three, said it was an insult to suggest her chocolate sponges could put the patients at risk. 'This is just

another example of the silly bureaucracy being brought in at the expense of common sense,' said the 49-year-old dental practice manager. 'It really is getting out of hand.'

'The WI are well known for their baking skills and home-made jam so we know what we are doing and our kitchens are certainly not a health hazard. In fact, they are probably a sight cleaner than

some hospitals these days. I know they are worried about the MRSA bug, but it certainly isn't going to come from my kitchen. What are they providing for the patients now instead of our cakes?'

'We've been making cakes for years without any problems. We used to make them for Saffron Walden Hospice until it closed a year ago and then we were asked to bake them for the elderly patients at the hospital.'

'There are 12 WI groups in the area and each month the members of one of the groups would make ten cakes.'

'The patients loved them and would always look forward to our deliveries. It seems a shame they are now being denied this small pleasure.'

The WI's cakes were banned after a routine hospital inspection by the Uttlesford Primary Care Trust.

The trust claims the decision was made after advice was sought from environmental health officers and the Department of Health.

A spokesman said: 'We are not in any way suggesting the cakes the

WI has kindly provided us are unsafe. However, the trust has to adhere to strict hygiene criteria and without inspecting the kitchens of WI members who prepare the cakes we cannot eliminate all potential risks.'

'The hospital treats very vulnerable elderly patients, many of whom have special dietary requirements. Patient safety is our top priority.'

'The problem is that we have no authority to go in and inspect a private individual's kitchen. The WI is not a commercial business with which we have a contract.'

'We appreciate that some members will be upset, but we very much hope that we can continue to work with the WI in other ways.'

A spokesman for Uttlesford District Council's environmental health department said: 'Everyone has to have a hazard assessment done when making and selling cakes to old people. These are established guidelines.'

The Department of Health said it was up to individual hospitals to decide food policies as long as they met safety legislation.

SAFFRON WALDEN
WEEKLY NEWS

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Cakes back on the menu

BY Pam Jenner

Email: editorial@saffronwaldenweeklynews.co.uk

VICTORY for the sponge!

Women's Institute cakes are back on the menu at a local hospital, thanks to the power of the press.

The *Weekly News* last week exclusively reported the plight of members of Radwinter WI, who were banned from baking cakes as a treat for the elderly at Saffron Walden Community Hospital.

Uttlesford Primary Care Trust decided to stop the supply of cakes because it could not guarantee the patients' safety without inspecting the kitchens where they were baked.

After the story broke there was uproar and the PCT has now decided to reverse its decision.

In a dramatic U-turn on the day the



■ VICTORY FOR COMMON SENSE . . . left, Radwinter WI president Glynis Straker with other group members.

article was published, a spokeswoman said: "Following advice from Essex Strategic Health Authority and the Health Protection Agency, Uttlesford PCT has reconsidered its decision to stop accepting cakes from the WI for patients at Saffron Walden Community Hospital.

"The PCT will accept cakes provided by the WI with immediate effect.

"Having examined the issue in greater depth, Uttlesford PCT has taken the view that the negligible risk to patients is greatly outweighed by the pleasure they can give."

Carol LeClercq, secretary of the Radwinter WI, said she was overjoyed with the news and was going to contact all her group members.

She said: "That is brilliant, we are so delighted. That really is wonderful. I must phone all of my ladies and let them know. We are very grateful to the *Weekly News* for the support. It is a victory for common sense and for the hospital patients. I can't believe how people have responded. I have had phone calls from journalists in Spain and Canada."

■ Your view – see what our Letters to the Editor writers had to say about the ban. Pages 6 and 7.

Patients can have their cake and eat it

Sweet victory for WI after hospital ban is overturned

THE president of a Women's Institute (WI) has described a decision to overturn a ban on it supplying cakes to a hospital as a "victory for common sense".

Uttlesford Primary Care Trust (PCT) had cited that jam sponges and cream cakes made by WI members for elderly patients at Saffron Walden Community Hospital were a potential health hazard, and banned them.

But on Thursday, after a wave of publicity, the PCT had a change of heart and lifted the ban.

Glynis Straker, president of Radwinter WI, said everyone at her group felt the ban was a shame because the patients at the Radwinter Road hospital would not be able to enjoy having homemade cakes.

She said: "We all just felt that it was such a shame. These people are in hospital, it is a little treat for them.

"What is in a cake? It was just a nonsense, a total nonsense, and common sense has prevailed and it is just wonderful."

The PCT said the ban was lifted on the grounds that the health risks to the hospital's elderly patients were small, especially when compared to the amount of joy patients had in eating the cakes.

A trust spokeswoman said: "Following advice from Essex Strategic Health Authorities, the PCT has



TASTY WIN: Members of Radwinter WI can once again bake cakes for hospital patients after a health hazard ban was overturned.

from the Women's Institute for patients at Saffron Walden Community Hospital.

greater depth, Uttlesford PCT has taken the view that the negligible risk to patients is greatly outweighed by the pleasure they can

patients' safety as it was unable to inspect the kitchens where the cakes were baked.

PICTURE: Daniel Wilson
580DW2

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made goodies. It was a part of hospital life.

The chance of catching any disease from the cakes is far less than the danger of being infected from the food some of the contractors supply.

Channel 4 recently exposed one such firm — it was the most disgusting lack of hygiene I have ever seen in a kitchen.

As the holder of an advanced diploma in food hygiene, I would wager that food suppliers do not have swabs taken before they serve food to hospitals, as was once the case.

*GORDON A. FUNNELL,
Southend-on-Sea, Essex.*

AS WELL as being expert cake-makers, the WI ladies would have kitchens so clean, one could eat off the floor.

I wonder if these pettifogging NHS officials ever had a childhood when mum had taken a sponge cake from the oven and placed on a wire tray to cool and, on turning back to put jam or butter icing on it, found it half eaten already. This happened when my youngsters were small.

The WI help the morale of hospital patients and I am sure are always welcome, especially with their 'hazardous sponges'.

*MABEL G. MOORE,
Norwich, Norfolk.*

Just disgusting

THE rumpus over the WI ladies who baked cakes for patients at their local hospital is the result of the failure of the NHS to bring the community into hospitals.

I remember when local ladies mended the linen, changed flowers on the wards, visited lonely patients and took them home-

ent and information purposes, please contact the Newspaper Li

Family Announcements

Deaths

HOARE. — Peter Joseph, passed away suddenly but peacefully in his sleep at home, on Friday, August 6th, 2004. The funeral service will take place at St Theresa's R C Church, High Lane, Stansted, on Thursday, August 12th, (today) at 11.00am. Family flowers only please, but donations, if desired, to East Anglia's Children's Hospices (EACH), may be sent c/o H Peasgood & Son, Shire Hill, Saffron Walden, Essex. CB11 3AQ.

YOUNG. — Maureen Elizabeth, passed away suddenly, on Thursday, August 5th, 2004, at Addenbrooke's Hospital, Cambridge, aged 62 years, after a short battle with cancer, to be reunited with husband Victor and will be sadly missed and always loved by sons Paul, Iain and Graham, daughters Claire and Lucy, grandchildren Sonny, James and Abbie, brother-in-law Robert and daughters-in-law Tania and Sue, sons-in-law Rob and Rick and uncle George and all her special friends. The funeral service will take place at Holy Trinity Church, Littlebury, on Friday, August 13th, at 3.00pm, everyone welcome at Littlebury Village Hall after the service. Family flowers only, but donations, if desired, to Cancer Research UK, may be sent c/o H Peasgood & Son, Shire Hill, Saffron Walden, Essex. CB11 3AQ.

In Memoriam

MOORE
Alan Alec

Passed away
August 16th, 2003.

In loving memory
of a darling
husband, father,
grandfather and
great-grandfather.

*We love and miss
you everyday.
You are always in
our thoughts.*

Your loving wife
and family

UN607190/105

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NICK LEGGETT

were here on your
19th Birthday,
August 15th, 2004.
Birthday wishes to
Heaven we send,
Wrapped in love that
will never end.

Love as always
From Mum, Dad
and Natasha

x x x

Engagements

Engagement

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Emma and Billy

on your
Engagement

Love
Sherry and Alfie

UN606951/105

WEEKLY NEWS Letters

THE Saffron Walden Weekly News welcomes letters from readers. Write to: Readers Letters, Saffron Walden Weekly News, 46, High Street, Saffron Walden CB10 1EE or e-mail them to editorial@saffronwaldenweeklynews.co.uk Please be as concise as possible and attach your full name, address and telephone number.

'Misleading' view of health officers over the WI's cakes

Sir, I would like, through your paper, to correct any misleading impression that may have been created of the environmental health officers of Uttlesford District Council, resulting from the widespread publicity given to the decision by the Uttlesford Primary Care Trust, to ban the supply of cakes by the Radwinter Women's Institute to the Saffron Walden Community Hospital.

Information was given by this service to a representative of the Uttlesford PCT earlier this year regarding the food safety requirements that apply to any provider of food, whether in the voluntary or commercial sector, to the hospital. However at no time was it stated to the PCT that a ban should be implemented on the supply of cakes by the WI.

Any person who supplies food for human consumption in a commercial operation (including by a voluntary organisation such as the WI) must comply with the requirements of the Food Safety Act 1990 and the Food Safety (General Food Hygiene) Regulations 1995. These require that all such food is prepared so as to prevent any risk of contamination whether from microbiological, physical

or chemical sources.

In the case of cakes there is unlikely to be any significant danger from microbiological contamination, however, there is the potential for physical contaminants such as glass or hair etc., or possibly from chemicals such as pesticides or cleaning agents. Generally it is accepted that the sources of the ingredients used by WI members will be from local supermarkets and shops and are unlikely to contain any such contamination. Where food such as meat pies, pasties or quiche are produced there are increased risks involved especially from harmful bacteria.

There is always the possibility of contamination arising within any domestic kitchen. In my over 20 years experience of inspecting a variety of home caterers' kitchens, I have seen a number of problems that could have been a potential source of contamination, ranging from a general lack of cleanliness, poor storage or refrigeration facilities or access by pet animals being allowed to the kitchen while food is being prepared. Women's Institute members are exempt from the need to register with

the council where they are preparing food for a WI market stall or if they do not produce food on more than one day per week. However they still need to comply with the Food Safety legislation and may be subject to an inspection by this service. In view of the low risk of the type of food preparation involved this could require an inspection by an environmental health officer every three to five years. The approach taken by the environmental health officers is to give advice and guidance in as informal and educative manner as possible. Anyone preparing foods at home for supply on a voluntary or commercial basis should contact us to discuss their specific circumstances. Further information and advice on food safety matters can be obtained from the Uttlesford Council website at www.uttlesford.gov.uk and following the links through environment/environmental health/food safety topics. Other free information and a food safety guidance pack is available from these offices by telephoning (01799) 510572 or e-mail to environment@uttlesford.gov.uk
Principal Environmental Health Officer

Senior Tory attacks killjoy officials intent on playing it safe

Fear of risk 'is turning us into a nation of cowards'



Oliver Letwin: Critical

By Jane Merrick
Political Reporter

AN obsession with banning everything that carries any risk is turning Britain into a nation of cowards, senior Conservative Oliver Letwin warned last night.

The Shadow Chancellor condemned the 'compulsive caution' which was spreading like an epidemic through every aspect of society.

'Our obsession with risk minimisation is imposing terrible risks on society,' he said.

'The call to minimise risk is a call to minimise love, trust, hope, enterprise, compassion and courage. It is a call for a cowardly society.'

'Is that really what we want? A society that stays at home, plays it safe, passes by the other side?'

He went on to raise the alarm about the effect on children growing up in this environment of fear.

'Inert and antiseptic, modern childhood is becoming a breeding ground for obesity and allergy; efforts to keep children wrapped in cotton wool to avoid risk is a certain recipe for long-term damage,' said Mr Letwin.

His intervention is part of the Tory Party's battle against the compensation culture which they warn is taking over Britain.

Shadow Home Secretary David Davis has already pledged that a Conservative government would scrap the Human Rights Act,

blamed for triggering dubious compensation cases.

Leader Michael Howard has also attacked political correctness.

Mr Letwin added that the removal of water from the Princess Diana Memorial Fountain for safety reasons illustrated the way officials want to take away 'all the bubbling dynamism of which society is capable'.

In a speech to the Centre for Policy Studies think-tank, he cited a charity pancake race nearly axed because of spiralling insur-

ance costs as an example of over-caution.

He also highlighted how the Women's Institute in Radwinter, Essex, was barred from baking cakes for elderly hospital patients because of 'strict hygiene criteria'.

Meanwhile, in Gloucestershire, an ancient cheese-rolling event was almost cancelled because it was considered too dangerous.

'These things matter, not just because of the killjoy threat to local traditions, but because they are symptomatic of a much wider

and deeper malaise: like a runaway wheel of Double Gloucester, our fear of risk is out of control,' said Mr Letwin.

Last month, Mr Howard condemned the politically correct culture flourishing under Labour and called for an end to excessive 'mollycoddling' of youngsters.

The NAS/UWT teachers' union has advised members to stop taking children on trips because 'society no longer appears to accept the concept of a genuine accident'.



Banned baker: WI member Glynis Straker