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## Covid-19: Hospital converts staff canteen into surge ward

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Medical staff at Royal Preston Hospital are no longer able to access hot meals from their staff canteen because it has been turned into a surge covid ward.

Charters Restaurant at the hospital is usually open from 8 am to 11 am and noon to 2 pm on weekdays but closed on 4 January so the space could be converted into a surge ward housing 50 beds. A physiotherapy gym is also being repurposed.

The hospital closed a visitors' car park before Christmas to allow a temporary Nightingale surge hub to be constructed. The Preston surge hub is one of eight opening at hospitals across England and will provide 100 beds for recovering patients from across the north west region.<sup>1</sup>

Lancashire Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, which runs the hospital, said that the closure of the canteen would be temporary, and that in the meantime, staff had access to a restaurant in the education centre which serves hot food, as well as a café at the front entrance. Hot food is also available from vending machines and a meeting room is being fitted with microwaves and converted into an area where staff can sit. There is also a pizza ordering service, a snack trolley, onsite shops, and outlets nearby which sell both hot and cold food.

Community organisations have sprung into action and are providing hospital staff with food donations, including pot noodles, biscuits, and crisps, while the canteen is closed.<sup>2</sup>

A Lancashire Teaching Hospitals spokesperson said that the surge wards formed part of contingency plans being put in place in the event that omicron cases continue to rise. The plans also include a focus on safely discharging patients as quickly as possible, and increased use of virtual wards and home oximetry.

"We hoped never to have to use the original Nightingales, and the same applies to these hubs but it is the right thing to do to put these plans in place," the spokesperson said.

Gordon Caldwell, clinical lead at Lorn and Islands Hospital, Oban in Scotland, tweeted that all hospitals should ensure that staff have access to affordable hot food and time to eat and refresh not only during the day but also at night, as this "would greatly improve morale and support recruitment and retention."<sup>3</sup>

1 Mahase E. Omicron: NHS is on "war footing" as Nightingale hubs are announced in England. *BMJ* 2021;375:n3159. doi: 10.1136/bmj.n3159 pmid: 34969669

2 <https://twitter.com/CicOwned/status/1480192329461948416>

3 Caldwell G. <https://twitter.com/doctorcaldwell/status/1478993541225451520>.