

Hospital Canteens



Canteens are run by WVS/WRVS/Royal Voluntary Service to benefit the health and happiness of the patients and their visitors. Volunteers provide a place for people to take a break and to bring comfort to those waiting for appointments.

The first static WVS Hospital canteen was established in Birmingham in 1943.¹ However it was an unofficial service until 1949 when Lady Reading and the Minister of

Health agreed WVS would run out-patient canteens. Early WVS canteens were usually small and run within the hospital or a hut in the grounds.

A WVS member acted as canteen leader and in the 1950s volunteers had to wear overalls while working in canteens. Their main provisions were sandwiches, later on canteens provided a variety of foods such as meat pies and sausage rolls.²

By 1971, WRVS could be seen in canteens in out-patient departments, psychiatric hospitals, long-stay patients and isolation hospitals or wards.

In the 1980s guidance stated that at least two volunteers had to be on duty when the canteen was open.³ Profits were used to help the hospital; money was not given directly but received as a gift in kind.⁴ Gifts were agreed between WRVS and hospitals and had to be for patient welfare e.g. curtains and televisions for the wards.

Throughout the 1990s and into the twenty first century WRVS continued use the profits to fund gifts for hospitals. In November 2012 WRVS gave NHS Grampian £500,000 raised by WRVS Hospital services.⁵

Today Royal Voluntary Service still runs shops, cafes and trolley services in hospital all over the UK.

¹ RVS A&HC, WRVS/HQ/NR/R9/1943-CB/BGM, Canteen and Clerical Depts, Dec 1943.

² RVS A&HC, 808a, Notes on WVS Welfare Work in Hospitals, 1949, RVS A&HC, 808b, Notes on WRVS Welfare Work in Hospitals, 1974

³ RVS A&HC, 808b, Notes on WRVS Welfare Work in Hospitals, 1971, 1974, Welfare Work in Hospitals 1984.

⁴ RVS A&HC, WRVS Bulletin Volume 27 1971.

⁵ British Broadcasting Corporation, WRVS giving NHS Grampian £500,000 donation, 30 November 2012 www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-north-east-orkney-shetland-20553944

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