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**A Study of Food Allergy Awareness and Knowledge
among Owners and Managers of Wellington City
Eating-houses**

**A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of**

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Food Technology**

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study was to explore the awareness and knowledge related to food allergy among owners and managers of registered eating-houses in Wellington city. Trained interviewers were recruited to administer a questionnaire to eating-house owners and managers. The questionnaire sought to evaluate awareness about declaration of food allergens, knowledge about how food allergens could become part of a meal, the type and content of food allergy management plans in place, use of latex gloves and food allergy training received. Data from the questionnaire was analysed using simple frequency distribution for all variables. Chi-squared (X^2) tests were used to assess relationship between variables.

Of 163 managers and owners of eating-houses invited to participate in the study, 124 (76%) accepted and 39 (24%) declined. Reasons for refusal were due to time constraints (n=23) and inability to communicate in English (n=16). More than half of the respondents were not aware there were legal requirements to declare food allergens and only seven percent knew the requirements were set out in the Food Standards Code. Knowledge of food allergens requiring declaration significantly differed among eating-houses that specialised in ethnic foods compared to those that did not ($p<0.05$).

Most respondents had good knowledge about the preparation, serving and cross-contamination of food allergens. However more than half of the respondents erroneously agreed or were unsure that serving water would help dilute an allergic reaction and 65% agreed or were unsure that food allergens could be transmitted through an ill food handler. There was a high level of self-efficacy to provide a safe meal and to manage an allergy emergency.

Owners and managers of eating-houses who reported previous training in food allergy management were more likely to have in place a written food allergen management plan ($p=0.05$) and a plan for handling a food allergy emergency ($p=0.05$) compared to those

without training. They were also more likely to have a training programme in place for their staff ($p<0.05$). Most respondents were interested in further training.

There was higher usage of latex gloves in food preparation among respondents who had received past training of food allergy management compared to those without training ($p<0.05$) however; latex gloves were used less among those who were aware of skin allergy issues associated with latex glove use compared to those who were unaware ($p<0.05$).

The findings from this study suggest the development of an education programme may help improve the awareness and knowledge of owners and managers of eating-houses and thereby help to reduce the risk of food allergic reactions amongst consumers in this setting. A change in food establishment registration requirements to include a competency to communicate in English is warranted. To help provide safe meals a written food allergy management plan and training for staff is recommended. For the protection of public health such requirements could be mandated as part of the annual verification process for renewal of eating-house registration.

*To my mother, Mrs Gyanmati Prasad,
who instilled the value of knowledge in me*

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