



Ocras was founded by Niamh Condon and Siobhan McNulty in 2022. Niamh is a chef, food consistency developer and food consistency trainer operating in hospitals and residual care homes. Siobhan has a background in financial management in the hospitality sector.

Ocras produces a range of frozen foods suitable for people with various levels of swallowing difficulties in its West Cork facility. The Ocras Dining with Dignity products are suitable for use in hospitals, nursing homes and at home.



Niamh Condon



Siobhan McNulty

About Health Innovation Hub Ireland

Health Innovation Hub Ireland (HIHI) was established by the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation and the Department of Health and is supported by Enterprise Ireland (EI) and the Health Service Executive (HSE) to drive collaboration between the health service and enterprise. We offer companies the opportunity for pilot and clinical evaluation studies and we provide the health service access to innovative products, services and devices that they may not otherwise be exposed to.

HIHI is built on the recognition that collaboration with enterprise can benefit patient care, patient pathways

and outcomes. We assess all concepts for healthcare innovation from those on the frontline – from clinician to porter. We encourage healthcare professionals to get in touch with HIHI if they have an idea or solution to how something in your job might work better.



The Healthcare Challenge

Dysphagia is a medical condition that affects normal swallowing. To prevent the risk of aspiration or choking, thickened fluids and texture modified foods have been used for dysphagia management with the goal of slowing down the flow of liquids and protecting the airway.

Dysphagia affects 8% of people worldwide. It is usually caused by another health condition, such as a stroke, head injury, dementia or cancer. People experiencing dysphagia can struggle to find suitable foods and usually have a limited selection to choose from.

There is currently no standard in place in Ireland for dysphagia-friendly foods. This has resulted in a lack of variety of suitable foods. Some of the foods currently available have found to be unappealing in terms of taste, texture and appearance.



The Healthcare Solution



Ocras has developed a new range of food products suitable for people with dysphagia. Ocras worked with Teagasc to create a novel edible glue-like formula that it uses to self-adhere foods. The Ocras food range is appealing in terms of visuals, taste, texture and palatability. Ocras has been designed to follow the International Dysphagia Diet Standardisation Initiative (IDDSI) framework, an international set of guidelines that is used to develop dysphagia-friendly consumables.



HIHI Role

HIHI obtained consent for Ocras to enter Cork University Hospital's kitchens for the purposes of the observation of food preparation and for staff to prepare Ocras dysphagia-friendly food. HIHI and Ocras observed the journey of foods typically prepared in the hospital from preparation to delivery to patient wards.

HIHI organised a focus group meeting to sample and provide feedback on the food. This group consisted of staff from various backgrounds, including: speech and language therapists, catering staff and consultants. HIHI also facilitated Ocras to attend research conferences where clinical experts has an opportunity to view and sample the Ocras products.



Outcome Report

Ocras gained a better understanding of the path of food preparation in a large hospital from its preparation in hospital kitchens to ward delivery to patients. Ocras identified where their products can best be introduced into this pathway. Ocras demonstrated their dysphagia-friendly foods to kitchen staff, who were also given the opportunity to both prepare and blind test them.

Following the extremely positive feedback on the Ocras food range from staff in terms of taste, palatability and texture, the staff expressed an eagerness to have the dysphagia-friendly foods available for their patients. At the conclusion of this project, procurement of Ocras food products is now being arranged by a number of hospitals in the South-West Regional Health Authority.



Testimonial

"The support from HIHI (Health Innovation Hub Ireland) was instrumental; they facilitated a focus group at CUH (Cork University Hospital), where the insightful feedback proved invaluable to our fledgling business. From our initial contact to now, their guidance has been both helpful and approachable."

We've already introduced our products across institutions within the South-West Regional Health Authority and are excited to expand further in the near future."

Niamh Condon, Ocras Co-founder