How Long Does A Box Of Chocolates Last On A Hospital Ward?

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A cardiologist at Addenbrooke’s co authored the first study of its kind to determine the answer to these questions.

Four trials were carried out at three hospitals, including two separate trials at Bedford Hospitals medical assessment unit and a general medical ward. The study was self-funded by seven authors altogether.

The study, which was published in the British Medical Journal (BMJ) found that the average chocolate survives 51 minutes, that it takes just 12 minutes for the average box of chocolates to be opened on a ward, and that a packet of Roses gets eaten more quickly than a box of Quality Street.

Cardiology registrar Claire Martin said that the study was both a bit of fun and the chance to fulfill a personal ambition.

Claire, who has worked at Addenbrooke’s, on and off for the past ten years, said:

“It’s certainly quite light-hearted for a BMJ piece, but the journal is still quite strict in its standard so it is written very straight and the statistics are all legitimate. The methodology and the conclusions are all as scientific as they can be.”

For the study the team had two boxes of chocolates place covertly into each ward at around 10am, a box of Roses and a box of Quality Street. Both boxes were placed under surveillance, and the time when each chocolate was eaten was recorded.

Although it took an average of 10 minutes for a box to be opened, the study found that there was then a rapid consumption of chocolates which then steadily slowed.

The observers recorded the job of each person who took a chocolate, with 56% of them taken by healthcare assistants and nurses, and 15% by doctors.

The study says: Wards have higher numbers of nurses and healthcare assistants compared with other groups, which might account for these findings. The chocolates were placed in the
main ward area at the nurses station or reception as these areas were easily accessible to all staff and the commonest place were gift chocolates are normally kept.

It adds: Given the short half-life of a box of chocolates, to ensure that all healthcare staff get benefits from consistent chocolate consumption it is the authors opinions that the frequency of chocolates delivered to ward needs to be increased and a concerted lobbying response instigated against manufacturers trends in shrinking the size of chocolate boxes.

Claire admitted that there were some challenges in carrying out the study: “The biggest challenge was not eating all of the chocolates ourselves. And we have had several people tell us that next time we need to study that they are more worried about Heroes versus Celebrations. Maybe we can research that one next year.”