

Improving Hospital Food and Beverage Environments

The CDC supports making the healthy choice the easy choice in every community setting.

As major employers and health leaders, hospitals can help establish strong community norms for promoting healthy and active living through nutritious food and beverage, opportunities for physical activity, support for breastfeeding, and tobacco-free environments. This P2P Series presents case studies of hospitals improving their environment to better support the health of their employees and embody the mission of their organization.

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Saint Vincent Healthcare University Health Systems of Eastern Carolina describe the steps they are taking to help employees make healthy choices.

Key Considerations

- *Offering additional training to foodservice staff on ingredient measuring can help ensure accuracy of nutritional information.*
- *Providing precise and appropriate serving sizes of food items can result in cost savings.*
- *Listening closely to consumer wishes about which healthier options they will buy can help avoid waste and cut costs.*

Goodbye Guesswork

Sometimes it can be a challenge to get things into more remote locations like Billings, Montana” says Barbara Hailstone, Assistant Director of Patient Services at **Saint Vincent Healthcare**. This is just one of the issues Hailstone and her colleagues face when trying to bring healthier food to the employees and visitors of the hospital. But with administrative support, St. Vincent makes use of the Just4U™ program created by ARAMARK. It is used as a foundation for increasing nutritional content awareness of the cafeteria food. The program focuses on providing accurate nutritional information posted alongside the foods for customers to consider as they are deciding what to eat. “We’ve had many people tell us that they feel more comfortable selecting the foods here because they know the nutritional value of the foods they are selecting,” says Hailstone. “If an employee comes in on a diabetic or low-sodium diet, or if they just want to eat healthier, the guesswork is gone” she says. In addition to posting nutritional information, the foodservice staff is trained in how to carefully measure ingredients and give out appropriate portion sizes so the nutritional information is as accurate as possible.

Hailstone also describes how support from the hospital administration has helped them take small steps to improve the food offered over the years. This includes offering a larger variety of fruits and vegetables to the entrée line and salad bar. “We use comment cards to find out what customers want. The employees of the hospital are the biggest repeat customers and they appreciate the changes made so far,” says Hailstone. On the basis of an annual survey, St. Vincent has seen an increase in customer satisfaction and in the number of customers who view the cafeteria as a healthy place to eat, which Hailstone thinks is a very tangible benefit.

Everyday

Options

University Health Systems of Eastern Carolina (UHS) consists of 8 hospitals in North Carolina varying in size from 144 employees to more than 7,000. Motivated by their mission to “enhance the quality of life for the people and communities that they serve, touch and support,” UHS has been on a gradual journey to creating healthier food environments. As Scottie Gaskins, Rose Ann Simmons and Kathryn Kolasa recount, efforts began years ago with UHS CEO, Dave McRae, driving the charge to offer healthier choices to staff and visitors. We partnered with our food-service vendor to start with “healthy Fridays” at their flagship facility, Pitt County Memorial Hospital (PCMH). “It was a small change but with positive response from the consumers it soon led to much greater changes,” says Gaskins. Eventually they ensured all hospital shifts had a healthy meal option everyday and that vending areas offered water and healthy snacks. Now almost every food station offers healthy choices and many foods are labeled. “We’ve even designated an entire eatery as a “heart-healthy” café in which 80% of the foods meet designated heart-healthy criteria,” Gaskins says.

Soon, other hospitals within the system were engaged and a system-wide steering committee was created to help share ideas and resources. Because every hospital is unique in size and culture, it is important to interpret policies and practices. UHS found that the smaller-sized hospitals were more nimble and able to make changes that took the larger hospitals years to accomplish. The steering committee allows the smaller hospitals to report back about challenges so others can learn from them.

Gaskins, Simmons and Kolasa all agree it is important to carry out initiatives according to the readiness of the specific hospital. “If you get resistance it doesn’t mean give up it just means set some specific goals to help move the culture of that organization along. Be persistent and repackage the initiative if you need to,” says Gaskins. They also emphasize the importance of making sure wellness initiatives are sustainable. “One of the ways we worked toward sustainability is by writing wellness strategies and metrics into our health system’s Strategic Framework and in developing supporting policies,” says Gaskins. There is an exciting new system-wide healthy food policy on the horizon at UHS. It calls for 75% of food and beverages to meet healthy criteria in the cafeterias and 60% at catered functions, as well as calorie labeling of all foods and price leveraging to encourage healthy choices. UHS will implement the new policy and continue its many other wellness efforts in the coming year.



Key Considerations

- *Teaching employees to practice healthy behaviors is important, but if the work environment doesn't support that practice, a key piece of the overall wellness continuum has been lost.*
- *Implementing sustainable healthy food initiatives that do not come across as something that will change if the leadership changes, is important for everyone to buy in.*
- *Creating a committee of representatives from each hospital within a system can provide opportunities to share ideas and interpret policies.*

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