

Hospitals Partnering with Public Health to Improve Food Environments: Part 2

CDC supports making the healthy choice the easy choice.

As major employers and health leaders, hospitals can help establish norms for promoting healthy and active living.

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Read how two hospitals in New York City partnered with the NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene on the Healthy Hospital Food Initiative, a standards-based approach, to make their food healthier in the cafeteria and for patients.

A Different Way of Thinking

Montefiore Medical Center is a large academic medical center in the Bronx, New York. Consisting of four hospitals, with 1,491 beds and approximately 90,000 annual admissions, it is considered one of the largest employers in the Bronx. At one site, the Wakefield Campus, meals are served to 850 patients and 2,000 staff and providers in the cafeteria daily.

The NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH) worked with the hospital to develop an individualized approach for improving access to healthier food and beverage choices among patients, staff, and visitors. They helped the staff tailor action plans and provided resources to support the change process.

Before partnering with the DOHMH on the Healthy Hospital Food Initiative (HHFI), Wakefield removed all sugary beverages from its retail venues. When HHFI was enacted, the DOHMH assisted Wakefield with making changes to the cafeteria by focusing on one food station at a time; basic ingredients were changed first, including choosing lower sodium canned products and switching to low fat milk. Wakefield also reduced beverage portion sizes to 16 ounces or less.

Beginning in 2010, Wakefield introduced “No meat Mondays,” “No fry Fridays,” and “Whole grain Wednesdays,” as a way to promote healthier choices. Hot entrees now incorporated predominantly whole grain foods, and they began offering taste samples of different grains such as quinoa. A fried munchies bar was replaced with a veggie and whole grain bar, and a healthy “value meal” was introduced, including an entrée, starch, veggie, and water for \$6.00.

“As with most things that change, some people found it hard to adapt. However, people adjusted, accepted the change, and realized it was for the benefit of everyone,” said Anibal Rivera, assistant director of Food and Nutrition Services. “Changes have had little effect on revenue in the cafeterias.”

There also has been positive feedback, helping Montefiore realize that it is definitely moving in the right direction. “Overall we have seen that people have adapted well to the new healthy choices. Sales of fruits and vegetables and lower calorie items have increased,” Mr. Rivera said.

One key point, Mr. Rivera expressed, is “through this process, we have come to realize that education and outreach is essential in order to get everyone on board, prepare them, and get their buy-in for the changes. Explaining the changes as they

Key Considerations

- *It is important to educate employees and visitors about changes as they are put into action to convey health messages and gain their support.*
- *Gather feedback from customers to engage them in the process and tailor changes to their needs.*



are occurring and the benefits of making these adjustments creates less of a culture shock and encourages everyone to take a different way of thinking. It also takes a collaborative effort, with top-down support.”

“Education has been a key ingredient,” agrees Nancy Deenihan-Gruber, assistant director of Food and Nutrition Services. “We ask customers to complete monthly surveys, which are anonymous, so we can track our progress, see how we’re doing, and identify areas of improvement.”

Moving to a Patient Centered Food Approach

Located in Manhattan at one of the nation’s premier centers for excellence in clinical care, biomedical research, and medical education, NYU Langone Medical Center serves approximately 600,000 patient meals annually to a diverse population. In 2012, NYU Langone overhauled its patient menu to make it more healthful. The change was prompted by patient feedback and supported by Robert I. Grossman, MD, dean and CEO at NYU Langone.

“Because we recognize the integral role healthy eating plays in both wellness and the healing process we worked to enhance the taste of our patient meals while improving the nutritional content,” said Amy Horrocks, vice president for Medical Services at NYU Langone.

To begin the patient menu overhaul, Jonathan Murray, RD, director of Patient Food and Nutrition at NYU Langone, and a team of culinary and nutrition colleagues reviewed the current one-week menu cycle and compared it to the HHFI Standards. Jonathan worked closely with the DOHMH staff to begin the process. Jonathan said that the new guidelines were an eye opener, but the DOHMH was very supportive. NYU Langone was one of the first private hospitals to participate in this initiative.

The NYU Langone team designed a demonstration menu that replaced convenience items with meal choices that used fresh, cooked-to-serve ingredients. Sugary beverages are now limited; soda was removed, but can be prescribed for therapeutic reasons, such as ginger ale for nausea. Also, 100% fruit juice is now only offered at breakfast rather than at every meal. Whole fruit was added to patients’ meals, and only fresh vegetables are served.

The medical center met with vendors to source products that met the nutritional criteria for the initiative’s standards. The menu was then tested with patients through sampling, and acceptability was measured using patient satisfaction surveys. Additionally, a menu guide was created that highlights nutrition content such as calories, calories from fat, sodium content, and carbohydrate content to help patients independently select meals to meet their dietary needs. Staff education was crucial to the successful implementation of the new patient menu. Initially staff was resistant to some of the changes being made, such as changing pork bacon to turkey bacon or beef burgers to turkey burgers. However, once they learned about the health benefits of the foods offered on the new patient menus and the importance of these changes for the patient’s diet, they embraced an outlook focused on encouraging patients to choose fresh and healthy options.

“Often people would like the benefits of a healthy diet but find it difficult to sacrifice their level of satisfaction. This is where the innovative culinary talents of a health care organization can be influential, by introducing patients, staff, and visitors to healthy, tasty, and satisfying foods that nourish both the body and soul,” said Betty Perez, RD, DHCFA, senior director, Food and Nutrition Services at NYU Langone.

As a whole, these changes have been favorably accepted by NYU Langone’s patients. The medical center’s Press Ganey patient satisfaction score for overall meals increased by 5 points within 1 year. Furthermore, staff has reported that patients who have returned to the hospital since the new menu was implemented have expressed that it’s much better than it was in the past.

“Our experience has been that when you offer fresh, healthy, attractively plated meals, the response is overwhelmingly positive,” said Murray.

Key Considerations

- *Educate all staff on nutrition and health benefits of changes to create an environment where the health needs of patients are being met.*
- *To prevent potential barriers that may inhibit your efforts, test changes to evaluate satisfaction and effectiveness with a target audience before rolling out.*
- *For more information on NYU’s efforts click here: <http://www.med.nyu.edu/about-us#sthash.eNUpdnMT.dpuf>*