

Fairview Hospital, Massachusetts

Roger Knysh, Director, Nutrition and Food Services

Fairview, a Critical Access Hospital in Western Massachusetts, interprets its mission of promoting a healthier community very broadly. Our Room Service initiative, aimed at improving patient satisfaction, naturally evolved into promoting healthier eating for patients and staff. Our rural Berkshire surroundings, with strong organic agricultural resources, facilitated our hospital's food services initiatives around food production and procurement.

After reading an article sent to us by our CEO in October of 2006, our Food Services Department began its fact-finding mission to learn more. This included a "Webinar", two conferences and site visits. What we discovered convinced us to make a formal commitment and in January 2007, Fairview became the first hospital in Massachusetts to sign the Healthy Food in Health Care pledge. Our dietitian and the Director of Nutrition and Food services developed a strategy for bringing in healthier food choices. This meant assessing our current vendors and their products, researching more appropriate vendors and altering our recipes and menus. The research led us to seek out and network with local farmers who could share in our vision of providing healthier foods, that is, foods that are not only nutritious, but also sustainable.

Internally, we filtered out trans fats from our recipes, eliminated the deep fryer completely, incorporated more whole grains and provided nutritional facts on our menu items. In addition, we began to charge more for unhealthy items, such as sodas. Other components to our strategy included the purchase of more seasonal, locally-grown produce and switching from vendors whose products contained hormones, pesticides or were produced with unnecessary antibiotics. Hospital employees have now sponsored an on-site vegetable garden.

We used a variety of strategies with our external community. For example, we networked with Berkshire Grown, a local (Farm-to-Table business program), visited local farmers to inspect their growing and sanitation conditions, and sent out letters outlining our new expectations to vendors. We developed a shared vision of building an alternative food system, deeply rooted in the concept of supporting local producers and vendors.

To cultivate these new external relationships, we have collaborated with a local high school that will grow and sell us herbs for cooking. Beginning this June, we will implement a farmer's market. The market will showcase one local farmer a week, who will sell his produce in the hospital. We have initiated a barter system with a local grower for compost, in exchange for reduced prices on fresh vegetables. Recycling and composting has significantly reduced our food service waste.

One year ago, our entire health system embarked on a "Wellness at Work" program. The healthier foods initiative became a critical part of this larger concept and we required creative thinking to integrate the two. Wellness at Work included such innovative programs as "Walk with Me," "Yoga at Work," discounts for memberships at local gyms, Weight Watcher groups, a healthy food show, and a "Purchase Ten – Get one Free" Fruit program. Our goal is to use these efforts to hardwire culture change.



Roger Knysh and Fairview Farm Stand

At the heart of our program is education, developed for staff and patients about the relationship between health and how our food is produced and distributed. While we have experienced some increase in workload, our new initiative has been well accepted by the Food Services staff, with little resistance from hospital staff. We believe that we have modeled strong leadership for healthy communities and ecosystems.

Excerpted from "Menu of Change: Healthy Food in Health Care"; 2008
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