

## Healthy foods, healthy environment work in tandem at Baptist Hospital of Miami

In February 2008, Stan Hodes had little time to be interviewed for this article. At the crack of a muggy Miami dawn on the loading docks at Baptist Hospital, Hodes was frenetically orchestrating the delivery of two behemoth dry heat convection ovens destined for some of Florida's busiest hospital kitchens in the facilities operated by Baptist Health.



“We’re going totally fryer-less and trans fat-free,” the executive chef barked in between taking breaths, his voice nearly giddy with excitement. “We don’t hold our cards close to the chest on anything. We want a workforce that likes coming to work. Our charge – *my charge* – is to reduce the cost of healthcare and a healthy diet is one way to do that.”

**‘We made a conscious decision early on in this process that we could not effectively demonstrate our leadership in good nutrition and wellness without an eye toward helping to reverse the cycle of damage that has been inflicted on the environment in which we all live.’**

**Stan Hodes  
Executive Chef/System Support**

Hodes’ remarkable enthusiasm is not lost on another charge he views with equal zeal: environmental stewardship. And his growing laundry list of projects includes conservation measures, green cleaning, an emphasis on renewables and an exhaustive plan for recycling.

According to Health Care Without Harm (HCWH), a global coalition of over 460 organizations in more than 50 countries working to protect health by reducing pollution in health care, more and more hospitals across the nation are working to provide nutritionally improved food for patients, staff, visitors, and the general public and create food systems that are ecologically sound, economically viable, and socially responsible.

HCWH asserts that hospitals have removed their deep fryers, while others have established farmers markets and are buying fresh, local sustainably grown produce while eliminating processed foods.

### **Is that chicken merango with jasmine rice pilaf on my hospital tray?**

Like so many facilities today, Baptist Hospital of Miami is learning that healthy alternatives to conventional “hospital food” don’t have to sound or taste boring. In fact,

Hodes' background as a hospitality industry chef is testament to Baptist Health's conviction to enhance the wellness of its patients, staff and visitors through evidence-based nutrition.

"Miami cuisine is complex, and members of our community represent many diverse cultures," Hodes said. "Catering to our customer base is just as complicated. We are expected to satisfy all palates, from the spicy foods of the Caribbean to the beans and rice staples of Hispanic cooking to traditional meat and vegetables. We look at this as a great opportunity." The effort is driven by Baptist Health's three-year "Transition to Healthier Menus" initiative, which includes healthier snacks in vending machines and the complete elimination of trans fat cooking oils in its kitchens.



**Breakfast beds in the "Oasis" section of the Baptist Dining room: Whole-grain options to breads and pastas**

"Patients are more likely to see grilled turkey on polenta with tomato salsa than 'mystery meat' on their hospital tray," Hodes added. In fact, healthier, fresher and more nutritious patient food is part of a larger commitment that includes specially discounted \$3 meals through "Wellness Advantage," its 7-year-old employee wellness program. Employees receive one free Wellness Advantage meal for every 10 they buy, and they sell out quickly. Served in all five hospital cafeterias, the meals even come complete with Baptist Health's own brand of bottled spring water.

Wellness Advantage meals typically are smaller portioned, use no salt during preparation, are labeled with complete nutritional information, and include locally grown fruits and vegetables from area farmers.

In addition, Hodes' kitchen provides a complement of low-fat alternatives to sour cream, butter, cream cheese, milk, cream, yogurts, mayonnaise and ice cream; low-sugar alternatives to cereals, jams and jellies; low-sodium alternatives to foods like soups and juices; and whole-grain options to breads and pastas.

Baptist Health's commitment to wellness has garnered praise from the broader health care community. Recently, the National Business Group on Health recognized the hospital system for its commitment and dedication to combating obesity and promoting a healthy lifestyle for its employees. Baptist Health was among exclusive company that included Dell, Motorola and the Kellogg Company in receiving the group's "platinum award."

## Green initiatives

Hodes said Baptist Hospital of Miami's Dining Services environmental initiatives are a natural progression of its healthy food program. "We made a conscious decision early on in this process that we could not effectively demonstrate our leadership in good nutrition and wellness without an eye toward helping to reverse the cycle of damage that has been inflicted on the environment in which we all live," he said.



**Fresh fruits adorn a display in the cafeteria: Many foods and produce are purchased from locally owned, minority vendors**

Among the current major environmental initiatives are:

- Discontinuing the practice of using running water to thaw foods;
- Use of biodegradable floor drain cleaners in lieu of acid- or high detergent-based cleaners;
- Use of an environmentally friendly neutral PH cleanser solution for hood self-washing dispensers;
- Recycling cooking oils and cardboard;
- Using rubber mitts in hot production to reduce consumption of paper towels;
- Recycling self-contained water instead of fresh running water in pot washer machines;
- Installing water coolers throughout the department to reduce use of plastic soda and water bottles; and
- Purchasing many foods and produce from locally owned, minority vendors.

In addition, plans are in the works to:

- Transition to biodegradable plastic service ware and plates from petroleum-based products in the hospital's retail and catered areas;
- Support chicken, beef and turkey suppliers that raise the animals in a free range environment, which means they have access to the outdoors for an undetermined period each day, and fish vendors that do not "farm raise" their product, meaning fish are not cultivated in ocean-based pens;
- Support "free trade" minority vendors for items such as coffee;
- Create more paperless food supply programs that use online requisitions vs. paper forms;
- Use biodegradable water bottles and cups made from materials such as corn resin instead of petroleum based materials such as plastic;

- Buy milk and chicken certified as antibiotic- and hormone-free;
- Recycle plastic, aluminum, and glass containers;
- Continue to lobby suppliers for more environmentally responsible packaging;
- Remove fryers from all Baptist Health facilities; and
- Create a “Green Team” to look at Dining Services opportunities.

### **Secrets to success**

Having leadership in the person of Stan Hodes and his staff is only part of the reason for the significant success Baptist Hospital of Miami has achieved in promoting positive changes in wellness and the environment.

For one, Hodes credits the support from the highest levels at Baptist Health. “Brian Keeley, our president and CEO, and Rev. David W. Cleeland, chairman of the board of trustees, are the driving forces behind Wellness Advantage and creating a healthy workforce,” he said. “They walk the talk.”

Moreover, Hodes is quick to credit his suppliers, and the Premier Foodservice program, which helped bring many of them to the table.

“Vendors in our food service areas have been essential to our success,” he said, noting the expertise and cooperation from Sodexo, which manages Baptist Health’s cafeterias and helped introduce the “Wellness Advantage” meals in 2002.