

Restaurant delivery with a “NEIDI” approach to satisfy everyone

News

The simple mention of “hospital food” is enough to make the average patient groan and most food service directors sigh. However, the Nutrition and Food Services Department at UNC Hospital in Chapel Hill is working to change that perception, one patient at a time. They are taking the “NEIDI” approach – Nobody Else Is Doing It created by their director, Angelo Mojica. In 2005, a sluggish economy made it difficult for UNC’s Food service director, Angelo, Mojica, CEC, MPH, RD, to implement a traditional room service program within the hospital. By 2009, stagnant patient satisfaction scores led Angelo and his team to embark on an 18 month pilot program in an effort to improve patient satisfaction on two of the lowest scoring units. The result was a scaled down patient menu that focused on the self-branded retail menu items and concepts they had been implemented in the hospital’s retail venues. Without any initial increase in labor force, the program was launched with impressive results. This new concept increased patient satisfaction scores from the percentiles in the 20’s to above the 95th percentile for both units within 2months of the launch, and the scores remained elevated throughout the duration of the trial.

The success of the pilot program posed an even greater challenge-implementation of this plan hospital wide to all 800 patients. The initial 2 page menu became a 20 page book with close to 100 entrees and 15 different restaurants representing all of the individual brands. In order to produce the new menu without additional labor, Angelo elected to produce the majority of the food in the retail venues under associate director of retail Ryan Miller’s supervision and serve it from the main kitchen. While the actual menu grew, the production methods shrank to accommodate smaller batches, increased storage needs and an overall evolution in production. For the first 6-8months, Executive Chef Shawn Dolan admits that there were daily changes which invited a learning curve for everyone. One of the changes included the introduction of Sous vide cooking on the patient menu side. This slow cooking process which places food products in vacuum-sealed bags has several advantages over traditional cooking methods: increased product yield; quicker finishing time; consistent product quality; and reaching final goal temperature without sacrificing quality. The implementation of this method meant that all salmon, hamburgers and grilled chicken would be cooked Sous vide. Using the NEIDI approach over time, in addition to the Sous vide cooking method the team engineered new ideas such as adding clear liquid smoothies, super shake which is equivalent in nutrients to a high calorie supplement, and low sodium shrimp and grits to the menu.

With the consolidation of production capabilities, the ultimate hope was that the spread of selection would keep any one area from being overwhelmed during peak mealhours. Initially, the Restaurant Delivery program operated from 7am to 7pm; however, the ever changing face of healthcare forced another change in February 2013. At this time, a smaller late night menu (small being over 30 entree choices, all sides, desserts, beverages) was added which meant production now ran 24hours a day, 7days a week, 365 days a year. The late night menu at UNC offers more than some facilities offer in their

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entire menu. One added touch many patients like is the ability to have breakfast all day. This enhancement allowed patients in procedures or getting hungry in the offhours to order food as they desired.

Two and a half years after its implementation, UNC Healthcare has benefitted from the remarkable results of this innovative program. Because the menu cross utilizes items between the retail and patient sides, there has been a 6% decrease in the department’s overall food costs. Angelo attributed this to very basic premise-items not served during peak patient meal periods were sent to retail venues and thereby avoiding waste. In addition to the financial benefits, this program was designed to address the issues of “hospital food” voiced from the patients themselves. Since its implementation, patients have looked favorably upon the changes and recognize the importance of still being given a choice in their meal options. Patients have a variety of options from sushi to shrimp and grits and can customize almost all orders. In order to accommodate patients on restricted diets, the personnel in the call center underwent additional training to help patients find acceptable menu items that would still comply with their nutritional need. Travis Watt, associate director of patient services, oversaw the training and implementation of the new menu and continues to work with the clinical team in order to comply with the ever changing nutritional guidelines. There is no surprise, the department saw a marked improvement in patient satisfaction scores which increased for the 82nd percentile to the 99th percentile within the first 6months and have remained above the 96th percentile.

Not willing to rest on their laurels, UNC Healthcare recently launched Restaurant Delivery at a new sister organization UNC High Point Hospital. Prior to restaurant delivery being implemented, Patient Satisfaction scores were at the 29th percentile (February 2014) by May 2014 scores soared to the 91st percentile. Restaurant Delivery is constantly being tweaked in aims for continued perfection of

service and is ever changing to meet patient’s wants and needs. UNC’s team recognizes good nutrition is an important part of recovery from illness or injury. Credited to the new cooking methods, higher quality, increased ordering hours, and plethora of other benefits Restaurant Delivery added, patient satisfaction scores are at all-time high and most importantly, patients are getting what they deserve from food service, “great food and great service.”

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Conflict of interest

Author declares that there is no conflict of interest.