

Making the Healthy Choice the Easy Choice in Hospital Cafeterias

CASE STUDY

As centers for health and wellbeing, MaineHealth hospitals know they have a responsibility to provide their community members with affordable yet healthy food and beverage options.

Because of this, the MaineHealth Food Service Task Force, a diverse group of Food Service Directors and staff, Registered Dietitians, Public Health and purchasing professionals, and other stakeholders, came together to increase access to healthy food throughout their organizations. The group quickly discovered that in order to effectively create change throughout an entire hospital system, it would be beneficial to develop shared goals, structure, and guidelines to follow. During this process, the group was invited to join the Partnership for a Healthier America's Hospital Healthier Food Initiative, and 10 hospital CEO's signed onto the commitment to align their efforts with a national initiative.

It was through this commitment that the hospital cafeterias worked to make the healthy choice the easy choice, building upon many of the healthy practices already in place. The hospitals worked to adopt standards in the following categories:

- Make healthy meals more affordable
- Encourage healthier beverage choices
- Focus on preparing healthier foods
- Label foods with nutrition information
- Market healthy foods in cafeterias & on menus

"Our goal was to make sure we offer more healthy options for those who might want them," said Mike Sabo, Director, Hospitality Services, Southern Maine Health Care, and Chair of the MaineHealth Food Service Task Force. "We firmly believe that this commitment allowed us to better fulfill our primary goal of providing our patients with the best care possible, while also promoting health throughout the community."

CASE STUDY *CONTINUED*

AS A RESULT OF THEIR PARTICIPATION IN THE HOSPITAL HEALTHIER FOOD INITIATIVE, THE HOSPITALS MADE SOME EXCITING CHANGES BASED ON THEIR SHARED GOALS:

- 100% of hospitals offered only healthy food options within 5 feet of cash register stations
- 100% of hospitals achieved fruit and vegetable dollar purchases of 10% of total food dollar purchases
- 100% of hospitals no longer have deep fat fryers on their premises. Many have also reduced or removed deep fat fried products from their menus
- 90% of hospitals met the healthier marketing criteria, which aimed to display only healthy food and beverage options and advertising in cafeterias and on patient menus
- 70% of hospitals labeled all items in the cafeteria with calories per serving
- 70% of hospitals offered a wellness meal that met specified nutrient and food profiles and was priced less than or equal to other meal options
- 50% of hospitals increased the percentage of healthier beverage dollar purchases to 80% of total beverage dollar purchases. 100% of hospitals procured over 60% healthier beverages

MaineHealth hospitals engaged employees in this process through focus groups, surveys and direct feedback. The Task Force worked with a designer to develop a visual system, “Check Plus” that led customers to the healthiest choices available in the hospital cafeterias. Finding a set of guidelines that aligned with MaineHealth’s mission and organizational initiatives allowed them, as a system, to take steps towards modeling healthy eating in all of their hospitals and to further support the health of their employees and the communities they serve.

THE 10 PARTICIPATING MAINEHEALTH HOSPITALS INCLUDED:

- Maine Medical Center
- Spring Harbor Hospital
- St. Mary’s Health System
- Southern Maine Health Care
(two hospitals merged into one organization during the initiative)
- LincolnHealth
- Mid Coast—Parkview Health
- Pen Bay Medical Center
- Stephens Memorial Hospital
- Waldo County General Hospital

To learn more, visit mainehealth.org/healthy-hospital-food or send questions to fstf@mainehealth.org

