

COVID-19 and Innovative Healthcare Food Service Responses



Healthcare leaders are pushed to be more creative than ever during these unprecedented times, especially in areas like food service operations. As hospitals respond to challenges and the “new normal” becomes a reality for healthcare food services, leadership should consider the following changes and takeaways:

- Staffing shortages have resulted in hospitals scaling back on high-touch room service models.
- Hospitals have returned to using traditional tray-line services with dedicated meal-delivery schedules.
- In an effort to reduce the amount of PPE used, nursing staff are passing trays for isolation patients as part of their patient rounding.
- Patient menus are being modified to streamline food production.
- Reusable trays and glassware are being replaced by single-use items.
- Hospitals are adapting to provide food services for pop-up hospitals.
- Hospitals are replacing self-serve stations with grab-and-go meal options.

Some retail spaces have converted to “pop-up markets” temporarily, offering staff members essential food staples to avoid supermarkets. Across the country, hospital administrators are approving free meals to staff members. Meals are offered through a variety of methods including use of patient food delivery systems for all staff.

Post-COVID-19 Considerations

In an effort to increase patient satisfaction historically, hospitals have implemented high-touchpoint service programs with patients for support service areas like food and nutrition.

Consider the following steps to help increase patient satisfaction:

- Implement technology-based programs that allow patients to order food from their TV, hospital intranet, or other independent ways.
- Cross-train support service departments to ensure appropriate staffing levels can be maintained.
- Replace self-serve stations in retail areas with grab-and-go items or other robotic alternatives that provide portioned meals to order.
- Increase use of disposable items as part of sustainability efforts in the food and nutrition space.
- Evaluate emergency preparedness protocol plans and edit for faster implementation of program changes during future pandemics.
- Continue to modify menu based on food availability.

As the COVID-19 pandemic progresses and food service operations begin to reshape into an innovative new form, hospitals are responding to these challenges while updating methods of patient interaction and service levels. The impact of this change needs to be examined carefully. These effects will extend into 2021 while hospitals restructure and modify programs to alleviate financial and service pressures caused by the pandemic.

INTELLIGENCE THAT WORKS

GREG HELMAN
Associate Director

CHRIS BROWN
Associate Director



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