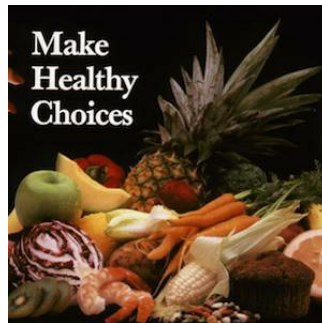

Healthy Options Leads to Rise in Hospital Retail Meals



More and more hospital cafeterias are serving retail meals and drawing in more paying customers. Modern Healthcare reports that hospitals served an average of over 1000 retail meals a day last year. This was 2.9 percent more than the year before. Retail meals account for 58 percent of all meals served in hospitals.

In the old days, hospital meals used to include food items such as spaghetti and meat sauce, beef stew and chicken pot pie. While the food may have been familiar and bland, it was still not very healthy. There was a tendency to use canned and frozen vegetables and very few salads. Patients would not have much say in the meal selection.

However, the new world of hospital cuisine is changing rapidly. Many hospitals today have culinary-trained chefs and offer patients fresh vegetables, grilled fish and chicken, a healthy salad bar and smaller desserts. Hospital meals have become healthier - with less salt, less fat and less carbohydrates.

Morrison Healthcare, part of the Compass Group North America has played a leading role in this transition. Morrison's Cafeteria was founded in the 1920s and catered exclusively to hospitals and healthcare facilities. It then merged with the Piccadilly restaurant chain a few years ago. Morrison and other similar companies brought about a change in the traditionally bad hospital food and some hospitals even started to grow their own produce.

Morrison has worked really hard on improving its food options. A study in 2013 highlighted that 60 percent of the offerings on its menu were healthy and included low-sodium options. The cafeteria has also modified its cooking methods using more seasonable and sustainable foods and incorporating whole grains and smaller portion sizes.

Hospitals are rapidly moving toward eliminating less-than-healthy fast food from their retail outlets. This month, the Cleveland Clinic severed its ties with McDonalds.

"We're removing salt and saturated fat, using fresh herbs and spices instead of salt," says R.J. Harvey, a corporate executive chef with Morrison. While some of the ingredients may be expensive, Morrison has large buying power and participates in a group purchasing organisation that protects their bottom line.

While hospitals are working hard to implement this change, there has been pushback against the healthier meals. People still want their fried chicken and their macaroni and cheese. But this trend is expected to continue as hospitals work towards providing patients meals that are cooked from scratch and are much healthier than ever before. It is a huge culture change for older patients used to fried and processed food but its what's healthy and better for all concerned.

Lauren Lorenzo, manager of employee wellness at Children's, said the hospitals offer a \$1 healthy food option for employees and families. "We are a health care organization," Lorenzo adds. "We want people to be healthy ... so they can take care of the kids. Healthy people are productive and make good decisions."

Source: [Albany Herald](#)

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