

# Kaiser Permanente — *South San Francisco Hospital*

## Early Steps

While it may be relatively small, serving about 225 meals to customers during the week, the Kaiser Permanente cafeteria at South San Francisco Hospital had big plans to improve its menu. The cafeteria management implemented the Partnership for a Healthier America's (PHA) Hospital Healthier Food Initiative beginning in March 2013 after Kaiser partnered with PHA.

The South San Francisco Hospital cafeteria is operated by the Fresh & Natural Food Service Group. Thomas Nguyen, Vice President of Fresh & Natural, helped oversee implementation of the guidelines.

## Goals

In partnering with PHA, Kaiser wishes to provide a healthy eating program for patients, employees, and hospital visitors by ensuring a wide variety of healthy items. Ultimately, the goal is to promote the healthy choice as the easy choice.

## Implementation

Jan Villarante, Director, National Nutrition stated "To implement these guidelines, Kaiser Permanente worked with Fresh and Natural to add healthier items to its cafeteria menus while removing unhealthy items, creating product specifications for the new menu offerings, and added two new wellness meals – one for children and one for adults." Fresh & Natural also changed food purchases to align with fat, sodium and calorie profile, fresh fruits and vegetables, and frozen foods with no added salt or sugar.

Since vendors were already offering many foods and snacks that satisfied the nutrition requirements in the appropriate serving sizes, it was relatively easy to purchase products that met the guidelines.

## Marketing and Promotion

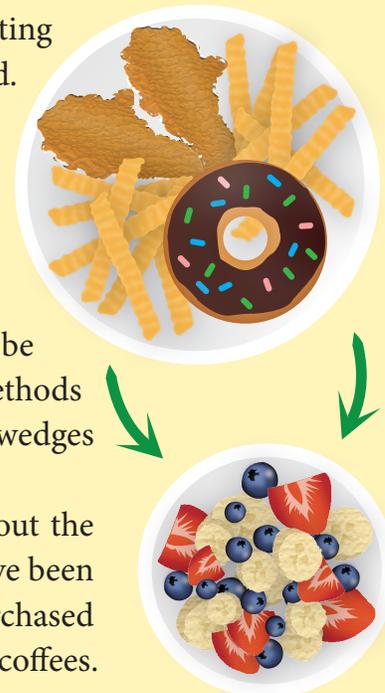
Advertising and promotion was a key part of the implementation strategy. In promoting healthier menu items, Fresh & Natural showed pictures of food with nutritional information like calorie, fat, and specific nutrient content. They also adopted a color labeling system, assigning items specific colors based on their nutritional profile. For example, light green-labeled items satisfy the guidelines, while orange-labeled items are less nutritious.

## Implementation Challenges and Solutions

The biggest challenge during implementation was eliminating fried foods and sodas. This was largely due to customer demand. Price point, habit, and the high stress environment make people gravitate toward these items, according to Nguyen. He anticipated this resistance, however, and says it will just take time.

Removing these items has also been challenging because of equipment. The cafeteria is currently waiting for new equipment to replace its deep fryers. Once installed, however, it will be much easier for the cafeteria to use healthier preparation methods when preparing different items (e.g. making roasted potato wedges instead of French fries).

Through all of this, Fresh & Natural realized that it's about the exchange. New items must be offered to replace the ones that have been taken away. After eliminating sweetened beverages, they purchased more coffee brewers to provide a greater variety of unsweetened coffees.



## Keys to Success

By gradually implementing the guidelines over a three-year period, customers had time to get used to all of the menu changes, and cafeteria sales remained consistent. Fresh & Natural attributes this success to strong marketing efforts, coordination among different hospital groups, and pricing differentials.

The cafeteria manager found it crucial to educate other managers about the purpose of the guidelines, and how to implement them effectively. Martha Gilmore, Medical Group Administrator echoes the importance of communication. "Some of the staff were reluctant to let go of their favorite french fries. But everyone is adapting to the change." Nguyen also recommends discussing changes

with stakeholders and developing an effective tracking system. Kaiser Permanente holds monthly conference calls with cafeteria operators to address any issues and to coordinate the initiative with different hospital representatives.

Finally, Fresh & Natural used crazy food presentation and price adjustments. Smaller sized plates and utensils are used for unhealthy food items, while prices have been adjusted so that healthier meals are now the more economical choice. Overall, both Kaiser Permanente and Fresh & Natural see implementation of the initiative as a success by creating the environment whereby the healthy choice is the easy choice for cafeteria patron to eat healthier and live better.