Factors associated with improved hospital meal satisfaction: Leadership implications for food services organizations

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Abstract

Hospital reimbursements have changed as a result of adopting the PPACA. Patient satisfaction as measured by the HCAHP’s survey is one of several measures that will determine these reimbursement rates. The overall rating of the hospital question on the HCAHP’s survey is influenced by a variety of hospital departments and functions including meals produced and served by Nutrition and Food Services departments.

This study is motivated by one research question with three sub-questions: (1) How can food service leaders develop service models that increase patient satisfaction while decreasing costs?; and (a) What are the factors associated with increased patient meal satisfaction?; and (b) What factors decrease food service costs?; and (c) What are the factors that facilitate increased patient satisfaction while decreasing food service costs?

The primary investigator conducted five in depth focus groups of UNC Health Care employees from food service management, hospital administration and nursing leadership. A total of 27 individuals participated in these focus groups. The findings from the research show the impact of different food service models on patient satisfaction and food service expenses. The Restaurant Delivery model was the only model reviewed that provided increased patient satisfaction while reducing food and labor expenses.

The findings support the prediction that hospitals consider implementing a restaurant style menu in an effort to reduce costs and increase patient satisfaction. Food service departments must make a business case to convince hospital administrators that investing capital dollars in this change makes good business sense. A description of potential pitfalls and how these were overcome with prior program launches will be necessary to gain required approvals.