

Henry Ford Health System — Southeast Michigan

Early Steps

The Henry Ford Health System (HFHS) took a big step to improve healthy choices offered in its cafeterias by implementing Partnership for Healthier America's Hospital Healthier Food Initiative (HHFI). HFHS includes four hospitals with approximately 23,000 employees located throughout Michigan. Each hospital cafeteria is independently operated, and collectively they serve approximately 29,000 meals each week. Tasked with leading this significant culinary effort was Director of the Center for Health Promotion and Disease Prevention, Bethany Thayer, MS, RDN, FAND and System Director of Culinary Wellness, John Miller.

Before implementation began in late 2012, a Value Analysis Team (VAT) was created to help streamline the process. The VAT included directors, managers, supervisors, clinical dietitians, and chefs who met on a monthly basis to work through implementation challenges ranging from food vendor issues to recipe selection.

Priorities

The VAT's top priority during implementation was to provide delicious, healthy food to customers – a goal that HFHS was already working toward. Prior to joining the HHFI, work was already being done to improve the taste of healthier menu items, and to remove deep fat fryers. Signing up for the initiative provided HFHS with more structure in this process, and helped the team focus its efforts on key tasks.

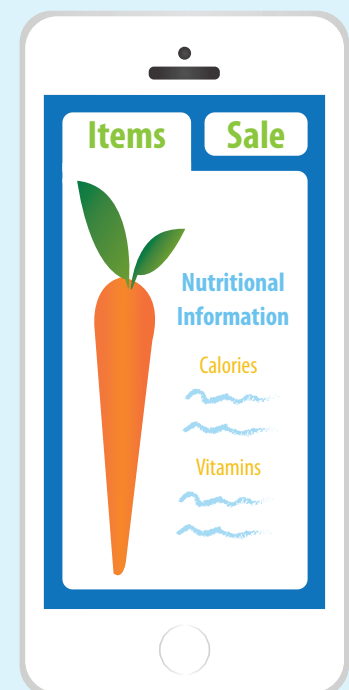
Sales were another priority. The food service team knew that the sustainability of these changes depended on cafeteria sales. In light of this, it was important to monitor cafeteria sales to assess progress and make any adjustments as needed.

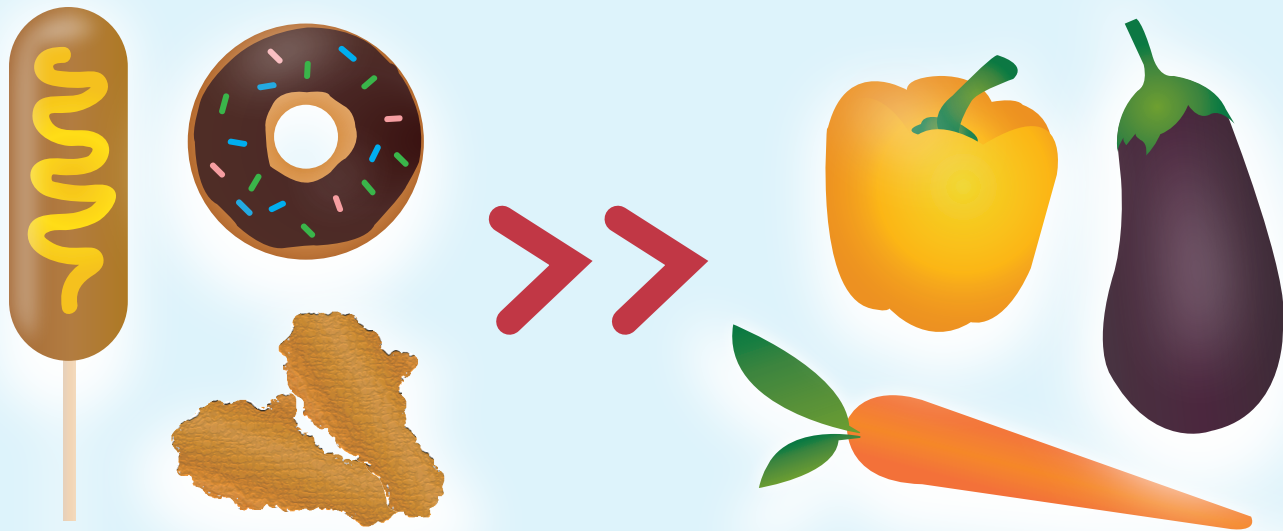
Implementation

Implementation began by expanding healthy menu options, which included new wellness meals and new gluten-free and vegan meal options. Next, staff worked on providing nutritional information for menu items, removing all deep-fried foods, adding lower sodium products, and offering more fresh fruits and vegetables.

As these changes were made, there was ongoing communication between the VAT and food service leaders. HFHS describes this as a “two-way conversation” that allowed for hospital and cafeteria leaders to confer about recipe development, and the appropriate action steps needed to implement each commitment.

Once the new menu was established, HFHS took several steps to promote it. They created a digital menu board that displayed nutritional information, offered special sales on healthier items, exclusively featured healthier items by the register, and put these items at eye level in other areas of the cafeteria. Their efforts proved successful as it helped to drive healthy food sales.





Challenges and Solutions

The coordination of major menu changes across four hospital cafeterias will likely involve some challenges. The first of which for HFHS was creating delicious meals that also met the HHS's nutrition requirements. The solution was to focus heavily on recipe development, and partner with food vendors to offer more nutritious products. By having an existing relationship with vendors, the team felt comfortable asking for certain products, like baked goods, to be reformulated to meet requirements.

Eliminating deep fat fryers and fried foods was another challenge. Preparation and planning was the solution for this. "We [had] a great deal of planning that went into that...we just didn't go and say one day, we are taking out the deep fat fryer. This

was an evolution that took approximately a month...because if you take something away, like deep fat fryers, you have to be creative and implement new concepts," said Miller. This involved creating "action stations" where salads could be prepared, and using different methods, like sautéing, for preparing foods.

Beyond the challenge of providing healthier meals was also the challenge of providing healthier snacks. Early in the program food vendors offered limited healthy snack options. This issue has been partly resolved by gradual changes in the taste preferences of customers. Additionally, the food services team has sought a faster resolution by leveraging its purchasing power across the four hospitals to meet their vendor's minimum sales requirements.

Keys to Success

Ultimately, HFHS considers implementation of the initiative to be a success. The commitment was met, and the cafeterias experienced an increase in revenue. Credited to its success was the unique combination of strategic planning with the VAT,

communication with stakeholders and vendors, and flexibility in prioritizing tasks. Of most importance, however, is that employees now work in an environment that is more supportive of making healthier choices.

Find story online: <https://sph.unc.edu/files/2016/06/nciph-cafeterias-success-hf.pdf>