

MEMORIAL HERMANN H/C SYSTEM:

Patient satisfaction scores soar in Texas hosp. network

The Memorial Hermann Health-care System in Texas has dramatically improved its patient satisfaction grades and increased its average daily census with a combination of standardized and individualized service improvements.

The results of the various program additions have been impressive: the group, which started out in the 27th percentile in the area of patient satisfaction according to Press Ganey standards, now registers in the 91st percentile.

Sheila Salyer, patient food and nutrition services dir. at 610-bed Memorial Hermann Hospital Southwest in Houston, says the new patient menu has served as the cornerstone of an overall program that has caused the steep rise in patient satisfaction. Southwest Hospital itself rose from the 31st percentile to the 96th.

New council formed: The driver of change was put in place a year and a half ago with the formation of a systemwide Food and Nutrition Svcs. Coordinating Council. The coming of the group was in keeping with the organization's overall mgmt. strategy. Similar groups operate in areas such as Pharmacy, Nursing and Women and Children's Svcs. Salyer, who took her present post four years ago, also serves as team leader for the system's Food and Nutrition Services Coordinating Council.

Different things: What led to the startling increases in patient satisfaction, says Salyer, were new strategies implemented with just that goal in mind. Variety was one factor, "but it's really a lot of other things, not so much the patient menu—although that helped."

Each of the facilities was given a free hand to develop programs they thought would be effective for their populations. One introduced a hostess program, with employees who went from room to room freshening things up and doing light cleaning as well as their f/s functions. They also picked up trays and assisted with menu selections.

Another hospital or two began offering a continental breakfast cart especially for new moms. (It also

serves continental breakfast to patients admitted the night before and hadn't filled out a menu, or simply to those who prefer a continental breakfast.) Another has gone with a spoken menu.

Each hospital switched from using "old insulated trays" and compartmentalized trays to china. "Appearance is everything, so I would say that across the board that helped improve things. We also went with a nice place mat. It cost Southwest about \$10,000, but it has played an important part in achieving the sought-after result of higher satisfaction scores."

Key communication: Southwest operates a main cafeteria (\$6,000 in daily sales, on an average per-person check of \$3), a satellite deli/cafe (\$1,000 daily) and a Starbucks unit (\$500). The staff also supplies food to a nearby office building and notches about \$1 million a year in catering. The average daily census at Southwest is 400.

Salyer's 120-member f/s staff works out of a 28-year-old cook-chill system which, until two years ago, supplied food to all of the hospitals in the system. In 1998, however, the other hospitals opted to bring production in-house. The kitchen, located in a building about a block from the hospital and connected via a tunnel, remains in use.

"In our hospital, it's all we've got," she explains. "We don't have a kitchen in this building. Everything is bagged and brought over." The main cafeteria is equipped with a grill, fryer and steamer, "but as far as food production equipment, there is none in the hospital."

Food is cold-plated and shipped to galley kitchens throughout the hospital, placed into refrigerators, rethermed at the time of service and deliv-



Memorial Hermann Southwest Hosp. increased patient satisfaction.



PATIENT LUNCH MENU SAMPLER

HEARTY BEEF STEW:

Served over rice, accompanied by a fresh tossed salad with your choice of dressing (Ranch, Italian, Thousand Island, French) served with cornbread.

DELUXE CHICKEN SALAD PLATE:

Our lighter version of classic chicken salad served on a bed of greens with a soft dinner roll.

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SPECIAL BEEF STEW:

Served over rice with a tossed salad, accompanied by a piece of cornbread and your choice of dressing.

SPECIAL CHICKEN SALAD SANDWICH PLATE:

On white bread with lettuce and sliced tomato accompanied by special mixed bean salad.

CRANBERRY CHICKEN:

Boneless breast topped with a cranberry glaze served with special confetti rice, fresh florettes of broccoli and a soft dinner roll.

LOW-SODIUM TURKEY AND LOW-SODIUM SWISS SANDWICH PLATE:

Served on wheat bread with special macaroni salad.

ered to patients by nurses.

New menu: The new patient menu features more cut fresh fruit; a cold plate at lunch replacing one of the two hot items; entrees bundled with vegetables; and fewer desserts. "We cut down on all the desserts we were giving and went with a fruit and one dessert, rather than trying to cover the whole gamut."

Trading a hot dish for a cold one was a move dictated by the patient population itself. As Salyer explains, "We found that our population was getting younger, and a lot of people now like a sandwich at lunch with a side dish of carrot-raisin salad or something like that."

Southwest's administration had planned for some increase in cost, but actually saw about a 7% decrease in patient tray cost (\$1.89 to \$1.76). Salyer says this was probably due to the way the menu reads: patients selected fewer items than they did on the previous restaurant-style menu.

Portion size was also decreased. For example, tossed salads and fresh fruit are now served in vegetable dishes rather than cereal (grapefruit) bowls.

Beyond costs: The cold items are no less expensive than the hot ones. According to Salyer, the goal was not savings. The hospital had already cut patient food cost "so much that it was at bare bones."

The upgraded menu costs about 10¢ more per patient meal than the old one, which "wasn't enough to really say that it was significant."

Chef Don Miller, was brought in by Salyer to instruct personnel across the system on the tenets of his Destination '10' program. Through it, they developed standard garnishes for each item and learned to judge presentation of the tray.

by Howard Riell