

Food Services

INTENT

The globalization of a western diet based on excessive saturated fats, refined carbohydrates and processed foods, together with increasingly sedentary lifestyles, are contributing to epidemics in obesity, diabetes and cardiovascular disease in many countries¹.

Health-care facilities are key in promoting health and sustainability through their food choices. The goal should be to reduce their environmental footprint and improving patient and worker health by making changes in hospital service menus and practices².

ACTING AS HEALTH AMBASSADORS

Limiting the amount of meat in hospital meals, cutting out fast and junk food, composting food waste, buying locally and sustainably farmed produce - thereby promoting local, sustainable production, producing their own food onsite, and holding farmers' markets for local producers to sell healthy food to the community³.

By promoting and supporting nutritious, localized sustainable food systems, hospitals can both reduce their own immediate footprint while supporting food access and nutrition, thereby helping to foster the prevention of disease, a reduction in the health sector's environmental health impacts and contributing to a longer-term reduction in the population's need for healthcare¹.

FIRST STEPS

- Modify hospital menus and practices to support healthier food purchases by buying locally produced and organic produce³. Including plant-based protein options.
- Make the hospital a "fast food free zone"; eliminate sugar-based soft drinks in hospital cafeterias and vending machines¹.
- Work with local farmers, community-based organizations, and food suppliers to increase the availability of locally sourced, sustainably grown food³.
- Encourage vendors and/or food management companies to supply food that is produced without synthetic pesticides and hormones, or antibiotics given to animals in the absence of diagnosed disease, and which supports farmer and farmworker health and welfare, as well as ecologically protective and restorative agriculture¹.
- Implement a step-by-step program to identify and adopt sustainable food procurement. Begin where minimal barriers exist and immediate steps can be taken, for example, by introducing organic fresh fruit in the cafeteria³.
- Educate and communicate within the hospital or health care system, as well as to patients and community, about nutritious, socially equitable and ecologically sustainable food practices and procedures³.
- Minimize and beneficially reuse food waste. For instance, compost food waste or use it as animal feed. Convert cooking oil waste into biofuel¹.
- Make the hospital a center that promotes nutrition and healthy food by holding farmers markets for the surrounding community and fostering community gardens on hospital grounds³.

CITED SOURCES:

¹"Menu of change: Healthy food in health care." Health Care Without Harm. Arlington. 2008.

²"Common Drivers, Common Solutions: Chronic disease, Climate Change, Nutrition and Agriculture." Institute for a Sustainable Future. Duluth. 2011

³"Legal & Policy Strategies for Health Care & Food System Partners." 2021