Good Ideas Become New Realities

For the last six years, it has been my pleasure and my privilege to work with hospitals across Washington state who have chosen to make a difference in the world through the foods they purchase and serve. This year was no exception. I’ve watched hospitals dig deep on issues they’re passionate about: increasing access to fresh fruits and vegetables, protecting antibiotics for medical use, and supporting agricultural practices that have a positive impact on human health and the environment.

Six years ago, the Healthy Food in Health Care initiative was more of an idea than a reality. It was an idea that we could catalyze the healthcare sector to use their purchasing power and professional influence to change the way food is grown and produced across the United States and beyond. Today, this newsletter shows me just how far we’ve come. Washington hospitals are tackling some of the most pressing food issues of our time—with support at the highest levels—and winning.

Compiling this newsletter was bittersweet, as it is my last with Health Care Without Harm. However, I know the campaign will live on with new staff and new ideas. I’m excited to see the future you’re creating.

Thank you for your inspiration, friendship, and trust. It’s been an honor working with you.

Kathy Pryor
Washington Healthy Food in Health Care Program Director

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Washington Welcomes New
Healthy Food in Health Care Pledge-signers:
Jefferson Healthcare, Port Townsend
PeaceHealth St. Joseph Medical Center, Bellingham
Providence Regional Medical Center Everett
Summit Pacific Medical Center, Elma

These Facilities Join:
Seattle Children’s Hospital
Evergreen Hospital Medical Center
Franciscan Health System:
Highline Medical Center
St. Anthony Hospital
St. Clare Hospital
St. Elizabeth Hospital
St. Francis Hospital
St. Joseph Medical Center
Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center
Group Health Cooperative
Island Hospital
Legacy Salmon Creek Medical Center
MultiCare Health System:
Allenmore Hospital
Auburn Medical Center
Covington Outpatient Center
Good Samaritan Hospital
Mary Bridge Children’s Hospital
Tacoma General Hospital
Northwest Hospital & Medical Center
Overlake Hospital Medical Center
Providence Sacred Heart Med. Ctr. & Children's Hospital
Seattle Cancer Care Alliance
Snoqualmie Valley Hospital
Swedish Medical Center:
Swedish Cherry Hill
Swedish First Hill
Swedish Ballard
Swedish Edmonds
Swedish Issaquah
United General Hospital
UW Medicine:
Harborview Medical Center
Northwest Hospital & Medical Center
University of Washington Medical Center
Valley Medical Center
Virginia Mason Hospital & Medical Center
On October 24, 20 Washington hospitals committed to serving at least one meat or poultry item raised without routine antibiotics as part of a national effort to raise awareness about the issue for Food Day. These 20 hospitals estimated that they served 833 pounds of beef, 655 pounds of chicken, and 428 pounds of pork and other meats raised without routine antibiotics. They collectively spent more than $10,000 just for this one day. If this continued over the course of a year, it would represent over $3.7 million on these types of products.

Nationwide, 352 hospitals participated in the Food Day campaign. They spent an estimated $146,345 to purchase 16,600 pounds of chicken, 10,000 pounds of beef, and 5,000 pounds of pork and other meats raised without non-therapeutic antibiotics. If amplified over the course of a year, this would represent more than 46 million meals and $53 million spent on more sustainably-raised meat and poultry.

"We’re thrilled to have so many hospitals across the country participating in Food Day this year," said Lilia Smelkova, Food Day Campaign Manager. "Conditions on large factory farms are causing significant human and environmental health problems, and this type of market-based advocacy sends a direct message to meat and poultry producers that these practices need to change."

Although many hospitals regularly buy meat and poultry raised without routine antibiotics, this was the first time the Healthy Food in Health Care team was able to quantify what this commitment could truly mean.

The connection between the unnecessary use of antibiotics in animal agriculture and antibiotic resistance in humans is a major concern among health experts. Four times the amount of antibiotics are used for industrial animal agriculture (29 million pounds) compared to human medicine (seven million pounds). This overuse in animals contributes to antibiotic resistant “superbugs”. These superbugs are responsible for 23,000 U.S. deaths each year, eight million hospital stays, and $55 billion in health costs and lost productivity.

“Hospitals need to drive market and policy changes that protect antibiotics and prevent their overuse in animal agriculture,” said Gary Cohen, President of Health Care Without Harm. “If every hospital in the country committed to serving meat raised without antibiotics year-round, we’re looking at over 730 million meals served and $845 million spent on healthy, sustainably raised meat. Imagine what that could do to protect antibiotics and the future of our health care system.”
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University of Washington Medical Center Tackles Antibiotic Misuse

In April, the University of Washington Medical Center food and nutrition team announced one of their most ambitious undertakings to date: the creation of a purchasing policy phasing out pork and poultry raised with routine antibiotics.

“Our epidemiologist indicated that many of our antibiotics no longer work with certain strains of bacteria,” says Chuck Zielinski, UWMC’s Food and Nutrition Services Director. “The reason we pursued the proposal to purchase antibiotic-free meats had to do with our department’s health and wellness program, and the mission of our medical center.”

The food and nutrition team at UW Medical Center is used to making big changes in the types of food they purchase and serve. They’re so used to change that they’ve created a protocol: examine the proposed change, the science behind the item in question, and how determine how promoting the change will serve as an educational opportunity to patients, staff, and visitors.

Over 80% of antibiotics administered in the United States are given to animals. However, only about 8% of those are administered for therapeutic reasons by veterinarians treating sick animals. The vast majority are administered to food animals to promote rapid growth and fend off infection in crowded living quarters.

The team wrote a proposal that detailed the rampant misuse of antibiotics in animal agriculture, and requested a budget increase to cover the increased cost of pork and poultry raised without non-therapeutic antibiotics. With the support of UWMC’s antimicrobial stewardship lead, Dr. Paul Pottinger, the hospital’s administration approved the request.

“After receiving approval of our proposal, we decided to focus on pork and poultry products first. I felt like these two protein categories were critical and had much more antibiotics [use] in their processing stream,” Chuck says. “Customers have responded positively, and in some cases they pay a little more for a slice of bacon or an antibiotic-free hot dog.”

In just eight months, UWMC reports that their pork and poultry project is about 90% complete. “The processed products have been the most challenging,” says Charlotte Furman, UWMC’s Technology and Wellness Manager, citing examples like soups and pre-cooked meats. “It has been a great experience to work with some smaller companies and producers to find products that work for us, and hopefully more large meat companies will begin to provide meats raised without routine antibiotics as well.”

“The best lesson I can share is to take it slow. Give the staff time to find and source all the products, and compare quality and price,” Chuck advises. “This also gives the market time to adjust. We found several changes with manufacturers and distributors as we ramped up and inventoried the new products.”
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Summit Pacific Medical Center Puts Sustainability on the Menu

When Summit Pacific’s Executive Chef Brandon Smith left his position at a large California hospital to lead the team at this small critical access facility in rural Elma, he saw it as the career opportunity he had been waiting for.

“I am passionate about creating dishes that not only look and taste amazing, but as a chef working in healthcare, I want to make an impact on the healing process, on the physical level, as well as the emotional and psychological,” says Brandon. “I like to feature whole foods to benefit and enrich the whole person.

In August, Summit Pacific’s CEO, Renee Jensen, signed the Healthy Food in Health Care Pledge at a community barbeque featuring chicken from a farm 10 miles away from the hospital. They expected a handful of people to show up, but instead the team sold out three times before noon, sending Brandon scrambling to use every piece of sustainably-raised chicken in his facility and the local grocery store.

“I have always believed that preparing freshly harvested produce not only tastes better but contains more abundant nutrition,” Brandon says. “I also believe that eating items grown locally and consumed in season contain the stuff that local residents need for boosting the body’s own immune system, and ensure their metabolism is functioning at a higher level.”

Since the barbeque, Brandon and his team have continued to increase their purchases of local sustainable foods and other products. They’ve achieved about 65% of their total poultry raised without routine antibiotics, introduced a non-GMO sliced bread line for the café and patient meals, and use social and conventional media to talk about the changes they’re making.

“We have been featuring Meatless Mondays and Farm Fresh Fridays. I have been getting local produce from Juel’s Unique Nursery in Satsop, and from Wobbly Cart Farm in Rochester, as well as some local organic and conventional produce through Charlie’s,” Brandon says. “We have eliminated hot foam cups, foam plates and bowls, and replaced them with paper and compostables. We are phasing out plastic PET cups, and replacing them with plant-based compostables.”

Brandon would love to have a greenhouse or garden on-site where the hospital could raise some or all of its produce. They’re also hoping to promote their beautiful setting and encourage exercise. “We’re working with our Foundation and Facilities to construct a walking trail around the property, to highlight some of the local nature, and create spots for exercise and stretching for staff and the public.”

Summit Pacific offers monthly community education opportunities and cooking demonstrations, as well as presentations to local organizations such as their chamber of commerce, to highlight the benefits of buying local produce and sustainably-raised meats.

“We have had very positive feedback from our local community,” Brandon says. “There are many members of local businesses that enjoy coming by for lunch who sit and talk shop over a bowl of soup, and we have heard encouraging words from our patients, staff, and the many guests who stop in with their loved ones.”
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Overlake Hospital Makes Sustainable Proteins Top Priority

Nine years ago, Overlake’s Executive Chef, Chris Lina¬man, contracted Methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus aureus (MRSA) after knee surgery. He was hospitalized twice in a three-week span, and doctors began preparing his family for the worst when they feared the infection had reached his brain. Luckily, after several rounds of different antibiotics, Chris’s doctors finally found one that worked.

Today, Chris is a strong advocate of preserving antibiotics for medical use. To that end, he has made purchasing meat and poultry raised without non-therapeutic antibiotics a top priority for Overlake. His efforts are literally changing the types of products available in the healthcare market.

In July of 2013, Overlake was purchasing 19% of their total meat and poultry from producers who didn’t routinely give antibiotics to their animals. By September 2014, Overlake had reached 59.5%, represented about $400,000 for fiscal year 2014. Chris estimates that by the end of 2014, Overlake will be purchasing 65-70% of their total meat and poultry raised without non-therapeutic antibiotics.

The easiest items to source were burger patties, and Overlake started with organic or grass-fed beef. The hardest thing to find has been pork, but Chris says, “USFoods has done great work in partnering with Bee¬lers, so we have now been able to get bacon, ribs, and loins.”

“Budget is the only thing hindering us from [reaching] 100%,” Chris says. “We need to ease in the increased meat spending over extended time, to ensure that we are able to make the additional changes necessary to keep our spending within our supply budget.”

By the end of 2014, Overlake will be purchasing 65-70% of their total meat and poultry raised without routine antibiotics.

Interested in buying meat & poultry raised without routine antibiotics?

As demand for meat and poultry raised without routine antibiotics increases, the market is responding with new products. Consider meeting with your sales reps to discuss what new items they may carry that meet this criteria, and make sure to seek out the following certifications or label claims:

⇒ Third party certified eco-labels: USDA Certified Organic, Food Alliance Certified, Certified Humane Raised and Handled, or Animal Welfare Approved
⇒ USDA/FDA label claims: “Raised without antibiotics” or ”No antibiotics administered” (poultry and meat products); “Raised without antibiotics that cause antibiotic resistance in humans” (poultry); “Grass-fed” (products from ruminants such as beef cattle, dairy cattle, lamb)
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Swedish Medical Center Hosts Organic Roundtable

For years, Washington hospitals have struggled with how to incorporate more organic foods into their foodservice operations. The health and environmental benefits of organic agriculture are undeniable, but the associated price tag on organic food can sometimes be intimidating.

To address this dilemma, representatives from 14 Washington hospitals convened at Swedish Medical Center’s Cherry Hill campus to brainstorm ideas on how to buy more organic products while staying on budget.

Diane Dempster of Charlie’s Produce mentioned that items like salad greens and bananas have relatively small differences in price between conventional and organic, and told hospitals to speak with their sales reps about taking advantage of seasonal pricing when it’s available.

For hospitals interested in buying more local organic products, Jefferson Healthcare’s Executive Chef, Arran Stark, offered this advice: “Be specific about protein and vague about veggies.” This approach allows him to plan in his menu in advance, but take advantage of harvest surpluses when they are available. Washington-grown items suggested for consideration were apples, carrots, and potatoes.

Although different models will work for different facilities, everyone in the room agreed on one key point: tell your customers you’re using organic foods. It can be communicated on patient menus, café message boards, or by using the organic logo.

Interested in buying more organic foods? Here are some ideas generated at the roundtable:

- Ask your produce vendors which items are close in price for conventional & organic to identify products you could switch at low cost
- Buy organic produce at height of season to guarantee best price & use kitchen labor to process it during low census times (ie, freezing organic blueberries in summer for use in winter)
- Place organic items on the salad bar, where you can promote them individually
- Reduce food waste through adopting a ‘menu du jour’ model and reducing variety of items offered
- Raise the quality of the food in the café with a correlating increase in price
- Work with local organic farmers to identify what they have in excess & may sell at an attractive price
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Valley Medical Center Transforms the Café

When Valley Medical Center transitioned out of contract foodservice to become self-operated in 2013, Food Services Director Danette Wickman and Food Services Supervisor Brian Lisser knew they were in for big changes—but it would have been hard for them to predict just how much change would occur in two short years.

Valley wanted to increase the number of healthy options they offered on-site without impacting their overall selection or undergoing any sort of remodel. To start, they began dramatically increasing the amount of fresh produce they bought and served. They opened a fresh fruit bar on their grill station, began highlighting fresh vegetables and starches in their entrée station, and transitioned to in-house smoothies that feature items like kale, spinach, blueberries, and bananas. Ultimately, they were able to increase their fresh produce purchases by 47% over their baseline quarter.

"More of our soups are now from scratch, and our new chef has done an outstanding job with these. We’ve been changing more of the soups weekly to peak customers’ interest,” Danette says.

Valley also began purchasing wild, hook-and-line caught Co- ho salmon from Bellingham-based Seafood Producers Co-operative, and estimates that they purchased about 1,000 fish this way in 2014.

Next, they worked with Valley’s Director of Marketing & Community Outreach, Liz Nolan, to create signage promoting free filtered water, as well as a “Go For It” logo now used to highlight healthy entrees and snacks throughout the medical center.

Valley also wanted to make sure that their vending machines were in line with their new priorities, and worked with Canteen to make sure at least 50% of the snacks offered in their vending machines met the “healthier” or “healthiest” criteria developed by King County Public Health. They eliminated sugary drinks in their vending machines, and increased offerings of water and juice.

With support and encouragement from Valley’s administration, the food and beverage team then launched a healthy beverage initiative in September, eliminating sugar sweetened beverages, and increasing their purchases of water, teas, juices, and milks. They created signage in the café showing how much sugar was in standard beverages, and made sure to communicate to hospital employees why the changes were happening.

"Go For It” logo promotes healthy items

New signage promotes water
Harborview Ramps Up Produce Purchasing

Harborview Medical Center’s Nutrition and Foodservices Department has had significant success over the last two years promoting healthy food in their retail areas. They increased healthy beverage purchasing by almost 25%, increased community participation in their biweekly summer farm stand, and expanded their promotion of healthy meals.

The area of biggest impact on healthy food consumption has been their increased sales of fresh fruit and vegetable in their retail cafeteria. Between 2013 and 2014, they were able to increase fruit and vegetable purchases by 42%.

“The numbers don’t lie,” says Ben Atkinson, Harborview’s Manager of Ambulatory Nutrition & Informatics. “We now purchase more fresh produce because people are buying it and eating it. As an added bonus, our cafeteria looks much more colorful and visually appealing.”

To promote increased produce consumption, Harborview’s Nutrition and Foodservices Department had to get creative. They removed pastries from their salad bar at breakfast, and replaced them with fresh fruit. They brought in attractive displays to strategically highlight produce near café sales areas and ordering stations, and highlighted different varietals of apples and pears, labeling them with specific names such as ‘Honeycrisp’ or ‘Braeburn’ to peak interest.

“The health value of eating fruits and vegetables is indisputable,” Ben says. “What is difficult is figuring out how to make them a substantial part of every meal or snack.”

The Nutrition and Foodservices Department has started using live “chef action station demonstrations” in the cafeteria seating areas to promote healthy eating. In October, they publicized the American Heart Association’s Heart Walk by demonstrating a “Green Machine Salad” recipe and offering samples in the café. They have also begun produce recognition rewards to thank hospital staff for a job well done. Recently, staff received pomegranates to celebrate a successful “The Joint Commission” survey.

“Staff and community members have been very impressed at the changes,” Ben says. “We’ve now made it easier to see and choose these foods in our food outlets. Our Director, Katie Farver, has made this part of the department’s focus, and the creative thinking of Retail Manager Chris Tharpe, and Chef RJ Owen have made these changes a reality.”

Chef RJ Owen, MS, RD, preps Harborview’s ‘Green Machine Salad’ to promote heart health
(Photo courtesy of Harborview Medical Center)
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Seattle Children’s Hospital Creates Five-Year Plan for Change

In 2013, Seattle Children’s Hospital created a five-year plan to completely revamp their food and beverage offerings. They had lofty goals: “Designing and opening a new kitchen with a room service program for patients and families, decreasing our processed foods by 80%, increasing our locally sourced and seasonal foods by 20%, meeting the RDI's for sodium in our patient menu, achieving 100% allergen safety of all foods to our patients, and doubling the scores on our family experience survey,” explains Polly Lenssen, Seattle Children’s Nutrition Director.

“In 2014, we had to select changes that would be visible and have high marketability, knowing that we really needed the new kitchen with additional production space and a totally revamped cafe to meet our five-year goals. We developed a list of what we believed we could deliver in a year with approximately four more FTE on the investment made by the hospital administration,” Polly says. One key piece was hiring a chef dedicated to patient meals, allowing the executive chef to focus on the cafe. “The other cornerstone was to involve a representative from every team in the department in our Mission Nutrition Committee to provide the criteria for our chefs to create their new menus.”

“We make all of our menu decisions using an evidence-based approach for the best health outcomes,” says Gina Sadowski, Nutrition Production and Operations Manager.

To date, some of those changes include switching the burgers and ground beef in their cafe and patient meals to beef raised without antibiotics, eliminating all breads containing high fructose corn syrup, switching to all local, cage-free eggs, making sure all milk products are rBGH-free, offering a hot vegetarian entree at each meal time in the cafe, expanding their healthy beverage and vending options, and offering a scratch soup every day. They highlighted turkey raised without routine antibiotics on the cafe and patient holiday menus, and continue to work with the medical staff and antimicrobial stewardship program to explain the relationship between antibiotic misuse in agriculture and antibiotic resistant infections in people.

The work has not stopped. Seattle Children’s recently brought in three fellows from Bainbridge Graduate Institute to assist in meeting the goals of the Healthier Hospitals Initiative, with two of them dedicated entirely to changes in the food and nutrition department.

One key aspect in creating all of this change is communication. “We engage our staff and patients through multiple forums,” Polly explains. “Updates in our hospital weekly newsletter, marketing at point of sale in the cafe, and notification of the entire nursing staff for each patient menu change—they are our critical ambassadors.” The Mission Nutrition Committee also hosts special education events featuring food demonstrations, local vendor samples, kids’ activities, cookbook sales, and education about their sustainability efforts. “It is so refreshing to receive formal compliments from staff on a weekly basis!”
WSHA Becomes a Supporter of the Healthier Hospitals Initiative

In September, the Washington State Hospital Association joined eight other state hospital associations in becoming a formal “Supporting Organization” of the Healthier Hospitals Initiative (HHI).

“The Healthier Hospitals Initiative reflects the values that we hold as a state: taking care of people and taking care of our environment,” said WSHA President and CEO Scott Bond. “HHI brings practical, workable solutions to hospitals so that we can improve the public health of our communities.”

Of the 98 hospitals in Washington state, 44 hospitals have currently signed up to be part of HHI. Twenty of those hospitals have committed to taking the “Healthier Food Challenge,” and are working to increase healthy beverages, reduce meat consumption, and increase local and sustainable food purchases.

“We are so pleased that WSHA has agreed to help spread the word about HHI,” said Gary Cohen, president of Health Care Without Harm and founder of HHI. “Working together with WSHA, we can let hospital and health care decision-makers know that HHI is transforming health care by encouraging all hospitals to purchase more environmentally preferable supplies, serve healthier foods, use less energy, reduce waste and more.”

“Seattle Children’s is working with HHI on all six areas, and we’re finding that they are a tremendous resource to our staff in all areas,” said Lisa Brandenburg, acting CEO and hospital president, Seattle Children’s, and president of the WSHA Board of Trustees. “We’re seeing a reduction in energy consumption, increase in recycling, healthier foods in their cafeterias, reduced dependence on products containing harmful chemicals, and purchases of environmentally preferable products. Health care has unique challenges in some of these areas, so it’s very helpful to work with people who already bring an understanding of the work we do. It helps us find good solutions faster.”

HHI works to reduce the environmental impact of hospitals by collecting and reporting data in at least one of six HHI Challenge areas: Engaged Leadership, Healthier Food, Leaner Energy, Less Waste, Safer Chemicals and Smarter Purchasing. Each individual hospital can chose any or all of the six challenge areas in which to work. There is no cost to participating hospitals, although they are required to collect and report data relevant to the areas they are working in.

Want to learn more?
Visit healthierhospitals.org.
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Want to get involved?

550 hospitals across the country have signed the Healthy Food in Health Care Pledge:

“As a responsible provider of health care services, we are committed to the health of our patients, our staff and the local and global community. We are aware that food production and distribution methods can have adverse impacts on public environmental health. As a result, we recognize that for the consumers who eat it, the workers who produce it and the ecosystems that sustain us, healthy food must be defined not only by nutritional quality, but equally by a food system that is economically viable, environmentally sustainable, and supportive of human dignity and justice. We are committed to the goal of providing local, nutritious and sustainable food.”

Additional Resources:
Healthy Food in Health Care: www.healthyfoodinhealthcare.org
Practice Greenhealth: www.practicegreenhealth.org
Healthier Hospitals Initiative: Healthierhospitals.org
CleanMed: www.cleanmed.org

Health Care Without Harm provides free resources for improving the health and sustainability of your hospital:

www.noharm.org

Questions?
Please contact Emma Sirois, Healthy Food in Health Care National Coordinator: esirois@hcwh.org