



Champlain LHIN HEALTH CARE UPDATE

From French Fries to Fajitas: Making the Healthy Choice the Easy Choice

Hospitals in the Champlain Region Are Changing Up the Menu for Staff and Visitors

October 14, 2015 - The smell of deep-fried food used to emanate from the cafeteria at the University of Ottawa Heart Institute. No longer. “What draws us now is the smell of the herbs, spices, baked chicken, and soup made from scratch,” says Cindy Knight-Vigneron, a registered nurse in cardiac rehabilitation. “I love the salad bar. It is a real treat. Actually, it’s the best salad bar in town.”



[WATCH](#) – video clip: Cindy Knight-Vigneron

In the Champlain region, hospitals are changing what they serve to staff, visitors and patients in their cafeterias, gift shops, vending machines and franchise operations. The aim is to reduce rates of chronic illnesses such as heart disease, stroke and cancer by creating an environment where the healthy choice is the easy choice. Hospital leaders have stepped up, determined to make their institutions true models of healthy living.

All 20 hospitals in the region have now voluntarily signed on to the region-wide program. They are decommissioning their deep fryers, posting calories and sodium counts, offering more whole grains, vegetables and fruits, decreasing portion sizes for high-calorie beverages, reducing highly processed snacks, and lowering sodium levels, for example.

“This is really about the hospitals taking a leadership role, seeing their responsibility as more than treating people once they are ill, but looking at preventing illness from occurring in the first place,” says Chantale LeClerc, Champlain LHIN CEO. “There are literally thousands of people that are coming through the doors of our hospitals every day, and those people are often hungry.”



[WATCH](#) – video clip: Chantale LeClerc

The Champlain Cardiovascular Disease Prevention Network (CCPN) spearheaded the *Healthy Foods in Champlain Hospitals* program, along with seven hospitals initially. The Champlain Local Health Integration Network (LHIN) played a leadership role and provided funding.

A number of hospitals have already made significant progress in the program, which is based on gold, silver and bronze standards. In fact, seven hospitals (Almonte General, Arnprior Regional Health, Carleton Place and District Memorial, Kemptville District, Pembroke Regional, Renfrew Victoria and Winchester District Memorial) were recently awarded bronze. Hospitals are collectively striving to reach bronze by December, 2015. At this time, the program is not primarily focused on patient meals at the bedside,

although dietitians do align meals to specific patient needs. Because the program is establishing a foundation for transformative change in hospital food preparation, bedside meals will inevitably improve as a result.

The progressively staged approach ensures the necessary buy-in from stakeholders and customers. For instance, pop is still available at bronze-level hospitals, but in smaller sizes. “We are not expecting the hospitals to get to that gold-end state tomorrow, because we know that is not realistic,” says Andra Taylor, regional dietitian for the CCPN. “Instead, we have created this phased implementation to allow the time for our hospitals to make these significant changes.”



[WATCH](#) - video clip: Andra Taylor

At the start, some partners were skeptical. For a number of hospitals, the program meant modernizing menus and developing new arrangements with suppliers. What’s more, negotiations have been ongoing with private franchises located on hospital campuses, which have pre-determined food choices set at head office. Generally, the fear was that customers would be dissatisfied or go elsewhere for their meals, resulting in decreased cafeteria revenue at a time when every dollar counts.

But those concerns weren't realized at the Queensway Carleton Hospital, which is close to achieving the bronze standard. "In fact, our sales and our business went up after we changed the menu because people are enjoying the new items as opposed to being upset," says Carolyn Brennan, vice-president of the hospital and co-chair of the *Healthy Foods* leadership task force.



[WATCH](#) – video clip: Carolyn Brennan

Positive feedback was heard at the largest hospital in Renfrew County, also nearing bronze status. Sabine Mersmann, vice-president at Pembroke Regional Hospital, states, "What made me feel really good is that when we joined the initiative a few people stopped me in the hallway or sent me an email to say that they were really, really happy that we are doing this as a hospital."



[WATCH](#) - video clip: Sabine Mersmann

Food-service teams at hospitals have been working diligently to make the modifications, showing innovation and creativity in their work. No one is prouder at the Pembroke Regional Hospital than chef Jonathan Thomas. He and his colleagues spent significant time researching healthier ingredients and figuring out how best to prepare new items. "We are embracing change and we are driving change at the same time – change to see healthier people, a healthier community and a healthier workplace," he says. "All in all, it is a great initiative."



[WATCH](#) - video clip: another chef, Daryl Burnie at the University of Ottawa Heart Institute

A senior leadership table provides oversight for the *Healthy Foods* program, and a dietetic working group sets nutritional standards, meeting regularly to exchange ideas. Quarterly audits to monitor progress are conducted by a regional dietitian at the CCPN. The audits assess collective progress and identify best practices to be shared with other sites, such as labeling strategies, cafeteria layouts and healthy snacks. The latest audit is underway now.

The program aligns with the CCPN and LHIN strategic plans. The CCPN invests in prevention initiatives that reduce the burden of cardiovascular disease in the Champlain region, and the *Healthy Foods* program is one of its five priorities. For its part, the Champlain LHIN has a vision of healthy people and healthy communities supported by a quality, accessible health system. The program also fits with the LHIN's goal of increasing coordination and integration of services among hospitals.

"I applaud the Champlain LHIN for making it easier for their staff, patients and visitors to make healthy eating choices in our community's hospitals," says Yasir Naqvi, MPP for Ottawa Centre. "This is an important initiative that will help improve our health, and it sets a great example for other communities to follow."

While other hospitals in Canada have started to serve healthier food in their retail settings, the Champlain initiative is unique due to its wide scope.

"It's a truly regional project involving dietitians, food-service managers, and leadership from numerous hospitals working toward a common goal," says Cholly Boland, CEO of Winchester District Memorial Hospital and co-chair of the *Healthy Foods* leadership task force. "I believe we are a trailblazer in terms of the complexity of what we are doing."

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