

For *Healthwise* Insert
July 18, 2007

Contact: Tom Quinn
Marketing Director
756-3513

*****8

Spoken Menu: “Room Service” Comes to CRMC

Visitors to the Cortland Regional Medical Center nursing units around breakfast, lunch, and dinner times are likely to be greeted by the enticing aroma of food as they step off the elevator. That’s because the Food & Nutrition Services Department has implemented a new program for patient meal service. The concept, known as *Spoken Menu*, is a version of “room service” and has become the major trend in the food service industry. The main goal is to improve patient satisfaction by serving meals “restaurant style” to patients right on the nursing units.

Wanda Rawson, CRMC Food Service Coordinator, acknowledges that past patient feedback on the ordering and serving process, as well as food quality, led her and her staff to look for innovative solutions. “We were stuck in a traditional way of doing things and knew we had to be creative if we were going to improve patient satisfaction. So we spent two years exploring other options, doing research, and visiting other hospitals for new ideas. The result is Spoken Menu.”

Spoken Menu works like this: just prior to each meal service, a portable oven and serving units are brought up to each floor. Each patient is then visited by a host or hostess who reviews the menu options that are available and takes the order. The host then returns to the serving station to fill the order. Within minutes fresh, hot food is delivered to the patient.

According to Rawson, she wanted to address three key areas: first, dramatically cut down on patient waiting times and consistently serve meals the same times every day.

Second, assure that patients are served every meal fresh, and each menu item at its proper temperature. Third, significantly improve the quality of the food served to patients.

“We really wanted to raise the bar on the quality of our food,” said Rawson, “and have the diversity of our menu to be restaurant caliber.”

To accomplish this third area, Rawson enrolled members of her staff in a 10-month culinary arts program that featured classroom training, hands-on experience, and demonstration. Each cook had to learn about, and then demonstrate proficiency, in 17 different categories, including: equipment handling and use, menu development, cooking fundamentals, recipe interpretation, presentation, and specialty skills (such as pastry and baking, sauces).

After they completed their training, the chefs were then assigned a “final exam”, which was to use their new skills to create two complete meals, coordinating all aspects of production. They are now all certified as “Culinary Specialists”.

In February, Spoken Menu was launched as a pilot program on the 3South nursing unit. “We wanted to ease slowly into the program and fine tune it as needed,” said Rawson, “Plus, give everyone a chance to adjust to it, particularly the nurses and our food service staff. I was concerned about how my staff would accept this new philosophy but they have really embraced it—they are taking more pride and feeling more valued in their work.”

In May, Spoken Menu was adopted house-wide at the medical center. While Rawson points out that the program is still a “work in progress” with some aspects still needing improvement, initial reviews from both patients and visitors have been very favorable. “We have received many comments about how good the food smells and how

nicely it's presented, patients appreciate that's it's served hot and on time, and they recognize the higher quality and variety of our new menu. I think patients see the difference, notice the improvements, and appreciate that we are doing all we can to make their stay a bit more comfortable. That makes all the changes and all our hard work all worthwhile"

##