Outsourcing Provides Value-Added Benefits to Healthcare Facilities

Today's challenging economic environment is causing hospitals and medical facilities to seek ways to increase income, conserve cash and reduce expenditures. One of the smartest ways to achieve these goals is by outsourcing specialty services such as food service management.

While hospital administrators believe they can't afford to outsource in today's climate, food service contract executives say that with the high cost of food and commodities, you can't afford not to. Healthcare food service management specialists like Pittsburgh-based Cura Hospitality extend a significant cost savings benefit by providing value-added culinary, clinical, service, purchasing and training expertise to their clients that immediately impact patient and guest satisfaction.

According to Kimmi Campagna, Director of Partnership Development for Cura, “Our goal is to help hospital administrators maximize their dollars.” To do so, Campagna believes that understanding the strategic goals of her clients is what makes the partnership between the hospital and contractor successful. “We adapt our goals to our clients’ goals, customizing our culinary and service to best meet the needs of the hospitals’ focus,” she says.

But, this doesn’t mean skimping on top-quality food and service. While Cura recognizes that one of their chief responsibilities is buying a better quality product at a better price, an even greater responsibility is procuring products that meet our gold standards for safe, healthy and fresh food. Campagna points out that purchasing whole and local food instead of convenience and frozen can offset your labor cost necessary to prepare foods from scratch and shipping costs. A former food service operator at Windber Medical Center in Windber, PA, Campagna explains that fresh foods when purchased locally through Cura’s FarmSource, a sustainable sourcing program that partners with over 200 farms and local producers of food, can be executed with little or no extra cost. Fresh food is healthier and tastes great which helps to speed patient recovery (since patients are eating better).

Better food also increases revenues in the hospital cafe and take-home offerings which may subsidize patient service improvement programs. After partnering with Cura in 2007, Windber Medical Center experienced an immediate soar in cafe sales. “Food and service satisfaction was so high that we had to extend our cafeteria’s hospital hours,” says James Eckenrode, M.D., M.B.A., interim CMO and CEO, Windber Medical Center.

Outsourcing also affords hospital administrators access to purchasing professionals who have the tools necessary to predict demand, avoid product shortages and reduce production waste, while receiving fresh foods and high-quality ingredients for use in their kitchens. “Judging from patient satisfaction surveys, we knew that our program was not where it should be,” says Joan Massella, Administrative Vice President and Chief Nursing Officer at St. Clair Hospital of Pittsburgh, PA. Cura was able to change that by introducing more fresh and locally produced foods and adding more vegetarian items to the cafes menu.

Contract food service management companies are the culinary and service experts, providing highly trained chefs and food service professionals, as well as the training to refine these skills. Through a Cura sponsored in-house training colleges such as the Cura Culinary, Service and HR Colleges, food production and service staffs are able to offer trend-forward cooking and presentation techniques, the proper service steps and procedures, as well as the human resource training that help them to recruit, manage and retain great people. “This is a benefit to our clients that adds lasting value as Cura understands investing in staff education at this level is impossible for self operators to achieve on their own. Additionally unique is that this training is offered to both Cura employees and the hospitals’ employees as part of your partnership agreement with no additional costs,” says Campagna.

Just as important, is the extensive clinical support and resources that outsourcing provides. When Windber Medical Center wanted to remove trans-fats from its patient menus, outsourcing to the experts helped them to be one of the first hospitals in the country to do so. Menu Concierge, a spoken menu service where food service staffs take menu orders at bedside just prior to the delivery of the meal, is also offered to hospitals to increase efficiency and the health of patients since their diets may change from one day to the next.

Improving sustainable and eco-friendly initiatives also save hospitals money, whether its making the switch from Styrofoam to reusable dishes and china, composting on-site or creating consumer supported agriculture opportunities at the hospital. “As members of the Pennsylvania Association for Sustainable Agriculture, we spoke to many small farmers who can’t grow enough to be involved with us. Through FarmSource, we are able to host mini farmers’ market events at hospitals like St. Clair,” says Jamie Moore, Cura director of sourcing and sustainability. Moore recently addressed members of The Hospital and HealthSystem Association of Pennsylvania, on ways to create greener hospital campuses.

“People who would have never considered outsourcing their food service are now taking a second look. It’s really about value and partnering with the experts who know how to spend your hospital dollars wisely, delivering great tasting food and increased satisfaction by making informed choices and employing expert resources” says Campagna.

For more information about Cura Hospitality, visit www.curahospitality.com.