

PeaceHealth implements new food services program

It aims to improve quality of stay at the hospital



Cook Leadi Cole prepares hot meals for patients at PeaceHealth Southwest Medical Center in Vancouver. The hospital overhauled its menu recently, incorporating new nutrition trends and patient feedback. Photos by Alisha Jucevic/The Columbia

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Sierra Bell knocks on the door of a patient's room at PeaceHealth Southwest Medical Center in Vancouver.

"Food service!" Bell calls. "Is it OK if I come in?"

After receiving an affirmative, Bell drops off a tray containing a chicken sandwich, salad and banana in the room of Wendy Schmidt, a Lewis County resident who has been staying in the hospital for nearly a week, only subsisting on liquids.

"This is my first real meal. It looks delicious," Schmidt comments.

Bell and Schmidt's interaction is simple, but new to PeaceHealth, which unveiled a unit host program in early May, where every inpatient is assigned a host who delivers their breakfast, lunch and dinner. Hosts, or diet representatives such as Bell, generally work a floor of PeaceHealth, taking orders with a tablet that interfaces with patient identifying information (room number and name), nutrition information for food items and also any dietary restrictions that their medical care team ordered.

For example, if a patient is in the hospital for congestive heart failure, the unit host software could track a patient's sodium intake over the course of a day, and let the diet representative know when the patient needs to opt for a meal choice that is heart healthy and has less sodium.

PeaceHealth's nursing care team used to serve patients, but Emily Pelts, the patient services manager and a dietician at PeaceHealth, said the unit host program is an upgrade because it allows the nursing care team to focus on other obligations.

"We can focus on providing a great customer service experience because that's what we're here to do rather than having the nursing team having to complete an additional task that isn't in their area of speciality," Pelts said. "It's great that we're able to have that face-to-face patient contact."

Menu overhauled

Pelts said unit hosts "have the unique benefit of being a department that people are excited to see when we walk in the room."

"It's another trend hospitals are moving to," Pelts said. "This is what patients are coming to expect and we just want to be in line with what best practice really is for our patient satisfaction and for our patient nutritional status and maintaining that as well as we can."

PeaceHealth has also overhauled its menu, incorporating nutritional trends and patient feedback. The new menu has more plant-based options for vegetarians and vegans, and offers 10 entrees a day, including multiple salads. The previous setup featured two entrees per day.



Sierra Bell, diet representative, left, delivers a freshly prepared meal to patient Ronald Gasiunas of Vancouver at PeaceHealth Southwest Medical Center in Vancouver. PeaceHealth recently started a new program where patients are able to order their food with a diet representative, who uses a tablet that interfaces with the patient's medical information to make sure they order food within their dietary restrictions. Alisha Jucevic/The Columbian



A freshly prepared meal is pictured in the kitchen at PeaceHealth Southwest Medical Center. The hospital now serves 10 entrees a day, instead of two, and has added more plant-based options for vegetarians and vegans.

“We now have a large menu that could accommodate your entire stay here without having to repeat something if you didn’t want to,” Pelts said.

Since diet representatives generally patrol the same areas taking orders, they get to know their patients and become familiar with diet restrictions. Pelts said the program has provided a snippet of interactive fun that patients relish during their hospital stay.



“We’re just really happy we can offer this service,” Pelts said. “We’ve gotten good feedback and overall patients can really enjoy that one-to-one and being involved in this decision they get to make. It’s the highlight of their day. We really enjoy being something they can look forward to during their stay here.”

<https://www.columbian.com/news/2019/jul/01/peacehealth-has-implements-new-food-services-program/>

Emily Pelts Patient services manager and dietician runs the unit host program at PeaceHealth. Photo by Alisha Jucevic/The Columbian



Sierra Bell, diet representative, delivers freshly prepared meals to patients at PeaceHealth Southwest Medical Center. Photo by Alisha Jucevic/The Columbian



Sierra Bell, diet representative, delivers freshly prepared meals to patients at PeaceHealth Southwest Medical Center. PeaceHealth recently started a new program where patients are able to order their food with a diet representative, who can help them customize their meals to fit their nutritional needs. Alisha Jucevic/The Columbian



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