

Celebrating Twenty Years: A New Model for Resident Dining at Douglas County Health Center

Beginning in 2012 and continuing through 2013 the Douglas County Health Center dietary department and Douglas County Health Center Foundation partnered to identify, discuss, raise funds for, and implement a new model of resident dining at Douglas County Health Center.

After studying long-term care research and reviewing medical literature that posited residents' quality of life improved and nutritional status increased when mealtimes focused on more individualized and self-directed involvement, the foundation applied for and was awarded a significant grant to implement a move away from tray-service dining towards buffet-style dining on all of the health center's neighborhoods.

In fact you might remember our 2012 year-end appeal letter focused on this initiative and, along with the awarded grant, we received many generous individual donations to raise over \$95,000 to bring this important project from idea to reality.

Mealtimes now look thus: Each long-term care neighborhood received its own heated food serving cart, refrigerator, and freezer. Serving counters were installed to hold side dishes, salads, dessert, bread, etc. Food is cooked in the health center kitchen and delivered to neighborhoods; residents then choose from their buffet meal options and are served in the dining area by employees. Wherever the dietary department has been able to do so, tray-service has been eliminated.

With this new buffet-style model, as the research had shown, we have found that the ability to choose your own food, socialize with friends, interact with attentive employees, and enjoy a delicious and healthy meal provides a dignity unmatched by other models of meal service.

Additionally, it is recognized that mealtimes are often the highlight of a resident's day. Through creating mealtimes where residents are free to choose, their appetite is stimulated, nutrition is improved, junk-food snacking is reduced, and social interactions are increased.

It is important to remember that when family members and loved ones are entering a long-term care environment they could perhaps feel that their decision-making and personal autonomy is narrowing in regards to their ability to decide for themselves. Our hope with this new dining model is to encourage the continuation of resident independence, autonomous decision-making, and control over one's choices.