

# Room Service Program Turns Complaints into Compliments

BY RHODA WEISS

**W**hen PeaceHealth, the parent organization for St. John Medical Center in Longview, WA, took a long, hard look at the food service for patients at St. John's, it saw plenty of room for improvement. Assembly-line meal preparation and delivery at set times, with few patient choices, meant that patients too often received the wrong meals, hot food was cold by the time it was served, meals went uneaten if patients were not hungry at mealtimes, and patients who were not in their rooms at mealtimes missed their meals. The system was costly, wasteful, and inefficient and generated a high number of complaints.

In late 1997, after two years of planning, St. John's switched to a 24-hour room service program with expanded menu choices, but at no extra cost to the patient. The switch has met with great success, producing higher patient satisfaction, increased productivity, and cost savings. Complaints have turned into compliments, as patients now have much more control over what and when they will eat.

## MEALS IN MINUTES

On arrival, St. John's patients receive an attractive menu containing an array of selections and information on how to use room service. The patient's nurse explains the process and the patient's prescribed diet. Patients can order room service at any time. To ensure patient-ordered meals do not conflict with physician orders, a computer-linked information system using new technology lists the patient's dietary needs and restrictions. Meals are delivered to the patient's bedside within 30 minutes, served on fine china. Tea and coffee are kept hot in a glass server, and condiments come in small glass cups instead of hard-to-open packets.

## A SMOOTH TRANSITION

The hospital's kitchen area underwent minor remodeling, and faster, more efficient equipment better suited to à la carte food service was



*Ms. Weiss is a  
Santa Monica,  
CA-based  
healthcare  
consultant.*

installed. The old assembly-style tray line was converted into a storage room.

Because fewer employees are needed for this type of food service, six kitchen staff members were employed elsewhere in the hospital or offered early retirement.

"We had to redesign everything from our food selection to our food delivery system," says Carol Dinsmore, food service director at PeaceHealth. "Although we started room service in early December 1997, we continue to fine tune it, making sure what a patient orders is consistent and updated with his or her prescribed diet and timing meals to coincide with medication for some patients.

"Switching to a restaurant-style system was a lot to ask of our staff," continues Dinsmore. "But the employees made the transition smooth and their energy and enthusiasm for the new service make it a success for our hospital and our patients."

*Continued on page 75*

Patients can order from room service 24 hours a day.



## COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES


Continued from page 69

# A full-time executive chef oversees the service.

Helping with the transition was chef Chris Simeone, "on loan" from Portland Marriott Hotel. Simeone helped the hospital get the new system up and running and teach hospital staff the new way of delivering service to its customers. The first few days were a challenge, but Simeone and the staff created delicious food and were soon running it up to patients like old pros. Now a full-time executive chef/supervisor continues to generate new ideas and oversee the service.

PeaceHealth plans to evaluate the room service program periodically to determine if patients continue to give it higher marks than the previous service. "This innovative trend in hospital service gives patients more control over what they eat and when they get served," says Steve Maldonado, PeaceHealth vice president for business development. "Instead of delivering the same food to all patients at the same time, room service is a more efficient way to ensure that all patients are well fed."

As a marketing tool, the room service program clearly communicates PeaceHealth's concern for individuals' needs and its commitment to service. Any complaints are immediately dealt with, and the patient receives flowers or a gift basket. Patients who know that their satisfaction is the hospital's top priority will undoubtedly tell others about this hospital that shows it cares. □

 For more information, contact Steve Maldonado at 360-636-4111.

# EDUCATIONAL EVENTS

Coming Soon from CHA

For information on specific programs, contact the person listed at the end of the program description. Linda Raney can help with other questions about CHA's educational activities. Call 314-253-3507, or write Linda at CHA, 4455 Woodson Road, St. Louis, MO 63134-3797

## BEHAVIORAL EVENT INTERVIEW (BEI) TRAINING

BEI technology is a powerful process for identifying and quantifying the competencies needed for successful leadership in the Catholic healthcare ministry. BEI training is intended for those responsible for identifying potential executives.

*Program Coordinator:*  
Carol Tilley  
*Contact:*  
Linda Raney  
314-253-3507

## JUNE

### 7-10 83RD ANNUAL CATHOLIC HEALTH ASSEMBLY

New Orleans

"Mission in the Marketplace" is the theme for the 1998 assembly—the largest national gathering of ministry leaders. Speakers will include Elie Wiesel; Doris Kearns Goodwin; Rev. J. Bryan Hehir, ThD; and Rev. Michael D. Place, STD, CHA's new president and CEO.

A complete program brochure has been mailed; watch the website for more information as planning unfolds. Or call the CHA Assembly Hotline at 800-230-7823.

The 1999 assembly will be in Orlando, FL, June 6-9.

The 2000 assembly will be in San Francisco, June 11-14.

## SEPTEMBER

### 9-11 MISSION: THE INTEGRATING THREAD

St. Louis

This seminar offers mission leaders, and other executive team members who share mission responsibilities, a forum in which they can define the mission role in a changing environment. It will

include discussions of contemporary healthcare issues, mission integration in a time of cultural change, and a plan for weaving mission into the fabric of the organization.

*Program Coordinator:*  
Carol Tilley  
*Contact:*  
Linda Raney  
314-253-3507

## NOVEMBER

### 12-13 FOUNDATIONS OF CATHOLIC HEALTHCARE LEADERSHIP

TBD

CHA has updated the former "Foundations of Mission" to reflect the Center for Leadership Excellence's research findings on leadership competencies. During this interactive program, participants will examine the Gospel values supporting Catholic healthcare; the mission, the ministry, and the healing tradition; the structure of the Catholic Church and its relationship to the health ministry; sponsorship issues; and the moral wisdom, social teaching, and scriptural foundations that guide Catholic healthcare today.

This program, sponsored by CHA's Center for Leadership Excellence, is designed for senior-level executives (e.g., chief executive officers, presidents, vice presidents) new to Catholic healthcare organizations.

*Program Coordinator:*  
Carol Tilley  
*Contact:*  
Linda Raney  
314-253-3507