LEADING THE TRANSITION TO **HEALTHY** AND **SUSTAINABLE** FOOD IN HEALTHCARE
Leading the transition to healthy and sustainable food in healthcare

Sustainable food in healthcare is steadily progressing - but whilst there is continuing momentum to build a more sustainable future, there are still many challenges and barriers to healthcare’s procurement of sustainable and healthy food, as well as prevention and reduction of food waste. Through implementing healthy and sustainable food policies and practices, healthcare facilities can not only protect the environment and the health of communities, but also support local economies and educate employees, patients, and families about healthy eating.

Recommendations for a healthy and sustainable food procurement strategy

1. Connect and engage with your team, integrate input from all departments (health professionals, kitchen, administration, even patients and visitors) to assess your current practices, and consider how sustainability could be further improved within your procurement policies.

2. Ask where your food comes from: assess related impacts upon health, society, economy, and the environment.

3. Include vending machines in your policy: procure healthier, and Fairtrade products instead of beverages and foods high in fat, sugar, and/or salt.

4. Work with local producers when procuring - thereby reducing food miles and food waste at source. This reduces reliance on expensive processed foods, and makes it easier to source fresh, local, seasonal, and organic produce.

5. Reduce meat portions and/or substitute with other high-protein products such as fish, eggs, cheese, and plant-based products from organic and sustainable sources.

6. Offer more plant-derived foods: i.e. fruits, vegetables, whole grains, pulses, and nuts. Offer vegetarian/vegan dishes on a daily basis, and ensure that fresh fruit is always available.

7. Highlight the “healthiest option(s)” on menus and in cafeterias, e.g. with a small icon, thus enabling everyone to make informed food choices and reinforcing food as a fundamental part of prevention-based healthcare.

8. Develop alternative menu systems e.g. verbal or electronic menus allowing patients to choose their meals closer to meal times. Consider ways of allowing patients to select a variety of foods, textures, and portion sizes.

9. Raise awareness and educate all health professionals about healthy and sustainable food in their training. Ward staff should be taught the importance of patient malnutrition screening.

10. Embrace the educational/community role of hospitals, e.g. verbal an electronic menus allowing patients to choose their meals closer to meal times. Consider ways of allowing patients to select a variety of foods, textures, and portion sizes.

11. Establish a simplified and flexible food ordering procedure with opportunities for meal cancellations, and provide an “in-between” meal service, if needed.

12. Establish protected meal times to allow patients to take their time to eat without being interrupted.

13. Organise working groups – e.g. with a small icon, thus enabling everyone to make informed food choices and reinforcing food as a fundamental part of prevention-based healthcare.

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15. Provide help to those who have limited manual dexterity or strength for tasks such as efficient storage, standard-sized serving utensils, and alternatives to disposal.

16. Establish protected meal times to allow patients to take their time to eat without being interrupted.

Final considerations

Healthcare facilities have an important role to play in creating healthier and sustainable food systems that guarantee environmental stewardship, maintenance of local economies, animal welfare, and protection of health and wellbeing for all citizens.

We therefore encourage YOU to take action and become part of the global sustainable healthcare movement by leading the change towards sustainable food policies at your healthcare facility. Join HCWH Europe and the Global Green and Healthy Hospitals (GGHH) network to share, learn, and connect with other sustainable healthcare leaders.

noteurope.org / greenhospitals.net

Health Care Without Harm (HCWH) Europe is the European arm of a global not for profit NGO whose mission is to transform healthcare worldwide so that it reduces its environmental footprint, becomes a community anchor for sustainability and a leader in the global movement for environmental health and justice. HCWH’s vision is that healthcare mobilises its ethical, economical, and political influence to create an ecologically sustainable, equitable, and healthy world.

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