

Morrison's crEATe kitchen targets chronic conditions



Morrison Healthcare has big plans to help patients with chronic conditions like diabetes, congestive heart failure and cardiovascular diseases. By incorporating culinary classrooms into its hospitals' foodservice operations, the contract company hopes to be an active part of the wellness process.

Before Morrison goes global with crEATe, it started local—at Truman Medical Center (TMC) in Kansas City, Mo., to be exact.

At TMC, crEATe was built inside a renovated retail space to the tune of about \$900,000. It sits just outside the main café, which was also renovated and reopened in January, and serves as both a retail outlet and a demonstration kitchen.

During meal periods, the space dishes up additional breakfast and lunch option with chefs preparing healthful items like pho noodles. There are a series of high-top tables that can be populated by hungry diners, too.

Once the lunch rush is past, crEATe transforms into a culinary classroom, with an open

kitchen and plenty of monitors, mirrors and cameras to optimize viewing. Professional chefs and dieticians from TMC teach healthcare providers (and eventually both patients and the community as well) basic culinary skills and healthful recipes that are easy and inexpensive to replicate.



By incorporating culinary classrooms into its hospitals' foodservice operations through crEATe, Morrison hopes to be an active part of the wellness process.

“Overall health is not possible without a healthy diet,” says TMC’s vice president of Professional Health Services, Lynda Donegan. “crEATe aims to instill this knowledge in a fun and exciting way.”

In the first phase of the crEATe pilot, culinary classes were held once a week for a quick 25 minutes. They tied into the hospital’s Wellness Wednesdays, which also featured a Healthy Harvest Market. In fact, many of the ingredients in the demos highlighted seasonal ingredients available at the market.

TMC’s Executive Chef Andre Yusus demoed the culinary portion while the nutrition lesson was presented by Jeneta Culton, RD, LDN, clinical nutrition manager.

“We decided to start the pilot with doctors and providers since they would be able to impact a higher number of patients at the start,” Culton says.

The next phase, which rolls out in the fall, will feature five-week sessions geared toward the staff and the community. Potential students will be able to sign up online with class sizes hovering around 20 each. After that, TMC will work with a dedicated wellness physician champion within the hospital to imbed crEATe's various curriculums into the wellness process for patients with chronic conditions. "Physicians and providers will be able to place a nutrition consult on a patient's chart. One of the hospital's dieticians will then meet that patient and refer them to the class if that's the best course of treatment for them," Culton says.

At this stage, TMC will be able to bill insurance providers to help cover some of the costs, which are minimal, reports Lisa Roberson, Morrison's senior director of wellness.

"Right now, the costs are small," Roberson says. "The major player is the time it takes our staff to teach the classes."

So far, Culton reports, this hasn't been a problem.

"Our chefs and dieticians are passionate about wellness. They're eager to participate because it's new and interesting and different from what we do every day," she says.



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The three main curriculums that will be taught from crEATe center around basic meal preparation and kitchen essentials. Graduates will receive parting gifts like a paring knife, a cutting board or measuring spoons.

“As we were developing the recipes, we knew that success hinged on easy, affordable and delicious menu solutions,” Roberson says. “Chef Heidi DeCosmo and I were very careful to pay attention to price points, ease of sourcing and, of course, nutrition.”

Recipes include better-for-you brown fried rice, smoothies, Latin breakfast bowls and a better-for-you meatloaf.

As TMC continues to evolve crEATe, Morrison has its eye on expanding the concept to other hospitals within its network including hospitals and healthcare systems in the Greater Chicago and Knoxville, Tenn., areas.

“Our vision is to create change within these communities,” says Roberson, who adds that the decision to implement crEATe at TMC led to a 10-year partnership extension with Morrison. “We have to find the teachable moments and make it not only affordable but easy for people to make more healthful decisions when it comes to food.”

As more hospitals have caught wind of the success of crEATe at TMC (sales are up 14 percent since the café reopened), more are reaching out to find out how they can do something similar.

“We’ve talked with our global healthcare taskforce team, which works with hospitals in Ireland and the U.K., and they’re very interested,” Roberson says. “We also just pitched the idea to a hospital in Qatar.”

Whether it’s in a dedicated demonstration space like TMC or on a rollaway cart, Morrison believes that crEATe has the power to truly change lives, communities and cultures.

“When chefs and dieticians work together with doctors to improve a patient’s lifestyle to be more healthy, everyone benefits,” Roberson says. “We have big dreams for health and wellness, and this is a very tangible step forward.”