

# Using Room Service

## to Support Culture Change

MANAGEMENT CONNECTION



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Anyone who has ever visited a resident in a long-term care center or a patient at a hospital knows that meals are a highlight of their day. Healthcare clients look forward to making food choices because they often feel like they have lost their ability to control other areas of their life. In recent years, facilities have adopted a resident-centered model of care that more actively supports a person's power of choice.

The culture change movement focuses on a client's right to self-determine, including what they eat, and when and where they eat it, among other variables. Don't we all love to make choices based on our personal preferences and habits? If a long-term care resident favors a leisurely

breakfast in bed over a busy dining room setting, the decision should be theirs to make. Likewise, those who love a bustling dining room can opt to socialize with their friends during mealtimes. No matter what individualized experience clients desire, they should feel supported and respected in their choices.

For some facilities, the transition to person-centered dining has been challenging. Change can be difficult anywhere, but in a facility that has had rigid systems and mealtimes in place for a long time or has staff members who are resistant to change, the notion of empowering clients with more choices will be stressful. It's important to thoroughly in-service employees on what culture change means, and



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how this forward-thinking approach can improve the lives of those in your care and drive satisfaction scores to new levels.

This article focuses on delivering the best possible room service and tray delivery experience for individuals in healthcare and other settings.

## DELIVERING TOP-NOTCH ROOM SERVICE

Providing a first-rate room service encounter requires an understanding of client preferences and expectations. Upon admission, ask each individual to share a bit about their eating habits before they entered the long-term care or healthcare environment. What times of day did they like to eat? What kind of foods did they choose for their meals and snacks? How about their favorite beverages? Knowing their preferences will help you tailor the menu to meet their nutritional needs, support quicker recovery, and prevent weight loss and dehydration.

An attractive and restaurant-like menu can do much to enhance the impression that clients and guests have of your foodservice program. Make sure the menu typeface is easily readable, and the directions

for placing an order are clear. Does the client check boxes next to the items they desire? Or do they call the nutrition services department directly with their order? Or does an aide visit rooms with a tablet and assist individuals in choosing their selections? Make sure clients are able to get food whenever they're hungry, and not just during traditional preset mealtimes. On-demand room service is the name of the game!

In a blog by Maria Hashemi of Cambro Manufacturing, she notes that because clients can order when and what they crave, they are more likely to have built up an appetite to eat it too. She cites the example of Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center in New York. The number of patients there who ate more than half of their main entrée at each meal jumped by nearly 50 percent after a new room service strategy was implemented.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, after implementing room service at St. Jude Children's Research Hospital, there was a significant increase in patient calorie and protein intake. Room service also resulted in staggering boosts to inpatient satisfaction scores where "Excellent" ratings increased by as much as 35 percent.<sup>2</sup>

## EQUIPMENT AND SUPPLIES THAT SUPPORT CULTURE CHANGE

Examine your current tray delivery system. Does it support your culture change initiative? Look for products and accessories that enhance the client experience. Choose room service carts that operate silently through your hallways so quiet time or conversations aren't disrupted. No more squeaks! Select equipment that keeps products at optimal temperatures – hot food hot, cold food cold. No one appreciates a warm Caesar salad, a cold pork chop, or runny gelatin dessert. Your client satisfaction ratings depend on delivering foods at the proper temperature. Good air circulation in carts helps foods retain their quality. And better-tasting food means less waste.

Different manufacturers offer different technologies, so be sure to research "what's new" and what will best meet your needs. Are you preparing 75 lunch trays daily? Or 750? Read user reviews of equipment you're considering, but keep in mind your requirements may be radically different than those of the facility across town.

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**PROVIDING A FIRST-RATE** room service encounter requires an understanding of client preferences and expectations.



Look for equipment that's reliable, easy maintenance, and ergonomically correct. Are trays at the top of the unit difficult to reach? Are doors and shelves conveniently positioned for ideal staff access? Be sure carts are easy to maneuver down narrow corridors and are simple to clean. Get feedback from the employees who will be using the systems to help you determine what's most practical for your operation.

Select products for your room service program which support your food safety goals, be they items that are NSF-approved or are disposable. Now may be a good time to evaluate whether to adopt the newest non-skid trays, which preclude you from having to use tray mats and prevent waste. Skipping tray mats may free up money for other purchases in your department. Or if you use placemats on your trays, research the newest designs in the most attractive colors and patterns, or choose those which celebrate the seasons or holidays. The same is true for napkins. Select pleasant-looking but absorbent products that enhance the mealtime experience.

Whatever tray system you choose, make sure the products are durable and sized to meet the needs of your clientele. If mugs have handles, are they easy for hands to grasp? Are bowls ideally sized for soups or salads? Make sure your plates and service ware are attractive, clean and not discolored, and pose no hazards due to chips or cracks. Use proper, well-fitting lids so clients don't struggle to remove them and contents don't splash over. Also, odors from contained items don't infiltrate to other nearby products. Explore the cost of reusable lids versus disposable lids, and look closely at ease of use for clients.

## FOCUS ON FOOD AND SERVICE

Great systems and reliable equipment are important for your on-demand room service program, but they're nothing without focusing on the food itself. Be certain ingredients are fresh, wholesome, and well prepared. Avoid overcooking or undercooking items for best quality. Plate items in the most appealing way possible. If the person has ordered all "white" foods (chicken breast, mashed potatoes, cauliflower), use a garnish to give the dish a "pop" of color, and consider serving on a colorful plate to provide contrast. Hold foods at the proper temperature.

Your menu should reflect current food trends. Regional foods are big now, and cuisines like Asian Island and



Peruvian fare are gaining in popularity. Know your audience though. If your residents enjoy meat loaf and beef stew, keep those staples on your menu. Ingredients like avocados, ancient grains, sriracha sauce, and spices with healthful properties are trending at the moment. Do they have a place in your dining program? In keeping with a client-centered menu, honor the individual preferences of those in your care.

An effective room service program requires committed, friendly, satisfaction-focused employees who can foster positive interactions with clients. These front-line staff members can ask questions and get immediate feedback from individuals. *Is everything you ordered on the tray? Can I help you with anything further before you enjoy your meal?* And when it's time to collect the trays, more queries can help you gauge the person's experience with their meal. *Was everything tasty? Did you have enough to eat?* These conversations can help empower the client while giving you valuable feedback that can improve your foodservice program. Clients who feel their opinion is important will regard their dining experience in a more positive way.

## SUMMING IT UP

Today's foodservice operations are discarding the rigid notions of strict mealtimes and narrow menu offerings in favor of more flexibility and improved on-demand room service programs. Take a new look at your meal delivery system and explore how it can be enhanced. The quality of life for your clients will improve, and your resident satisfaction scores will soar. **E**

**GREAT SYSTEMS** and reliable equipment are important for your on-demand room service program, but they're nothing without focusing on the food itself.



## REFERENCES

1. <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/12518836>
2. <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/9699455>

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1. A resident-centered model of care supports
  - A. A person's power of choice
  - B. A medical student's bedside manner
  - C. A tough love philosophy
2. Providing a first-rate room service experience requires
  - A. Uniformed servers delivering client meals
  - B. An understanding of client preferences and expectations
  - C. A bud vase with fresh flowers on each tray
3. Knowing a client's preferred foods and eating habits can help
  - A. Enhance their quality of life
  - B. Prevent weight loss and dehydration
  - C. Both A and B
4. Room service carts should
  - A. Keep food at optimal temperatures
  - B. Be easy to maneuver and easy to maintain
  - C. Both A and B
5. Look for room service carts that are
  - A. Quiet and ergonomically correct
  - B. As tall as possible for maximum tray capacity
  - C. Squeaky, so clients can hear their food coming
6. When choosing serving ware, ensure that
  - A. Mugs are easy to grasp and have well-fitting lids
  - B. Bowls are ideally sized for soups and salads
  - C. Both A and B
7. Your room service menu should offer
  - A. Just two entree choices so the client is not overwhelmed
  - B. A variety of options so clients can make individualized choices
  - C. Only the most trendy foods

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