

Providing Micro Markets In Healthcare Settings

MANAGEMENT CONNECTION

BENEFITS OF A MICRO MARKET

- Convenient for customer groups, such as employees, facility residents, or visitors
- Saves a trip to the local grocery or big box store
- Can stem the spread of infection to outside retail spaces
- Cost savings, if a facility purchases in bulk and passes savings on to customers

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The COVID-19 pandemic has made the world look closely at everything we do. Simple tasks of daily life have been uprooted and reinvented to promote safety and “flatten the curve.”

This pandemic has stretched our healthcare system beyond any other crisis. Healthcare employees are working long shifts and sometimes multiple weeks without days off. These professionals are not only at high risk for contracting the coronavirus, they are also at high risk for burnout. Besides their personal sacrifices and uncertainties, their families are also sacrificing time with their loved one and may be at greater risk of exposure to COVID-19. For workers on the front lines in health care and food service,

managing family life means tackling everyday tasks differently to prevent the spread.

Additionally, grocery stores across the country are operating with limited products on the shelves. Ordinary items that Americans typically purchase—such as eggs, meat, paper products, and cleaning supplies—are often scarce and not consistently available. Meanwhile, commercial food distributors have been facing a problem of their own. Restaurants that are closed are not purchasing food from distributors like they usually would, and eateries that remain open are offering only limited menus.

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While many school districts continued to prepare food for students learning at home, those students often represented a fraction of the average number that typically participated in meal service at school. Add to that closed universities, sports arenas and other attractions, and suddenly many food distributors have a significant amount of product on hand, and this food is moving much slower than usual. Or, the product is not packaged appropriately to meet current demand and usage needs.

The International Foodservice Distributors Association reports that commercial food distributors have felt the impact of drastically reduced sales. But while certain businesses came to a screeching halt, hospitals, eldercare facilities, and the military's demand for food and supplies increased significantly. Distribution channels look radically different at the moment, the result of market shifts, stay at home orders, and other factors impacting product use and flow.

Perhaps the most challenging component of COVID-19 is keeping our older adults safe. While many grocery stores attempted to provide an added layer of protection by designating specific shopping hours for older customers, this practice could expose these seniors to individuals that live in communities experiencing a greater incidence of the virus.

Due to many unknowns about coronavirus, it can be difficult to determine proper procedures for limiting the spread. Healthcare workers are juggling their stressful and exhausting jobs, and their family life. With schools closed, it adds another layer of responsibility for those who are also parents of school-aged children.

ENTER ON-SITE MICRO MARKETS

When leaving work, it's common to stop by the grocery store on the way home. As healthcare employees go to grocery stores, the possibility of transmitting the virus to fellow shoppers increases. Keeping healthcare employees from having to stop in public places protects people beyond those in our care. Communities may be safer with less exposure to workers who have just left an infectious disease environment.

When our hospitals, senior living communities, continuing care retirement communities (CCRCs), and retirement communities provide micro market stores on-site, it becomes a helpful solution for both employees and customers. Employees benefit from having convenient access to groceries. They save an extra stop on their way home, and they can access supplies that are not always available in the marketplace. For

our older adult customers, access to small supermarkets onsite where they live brings back the independence of purchasing groceries, with less risk of exposure to the general population.

Although micro markets in healthcare settings are certainly not new, they have gained momentum and have grown in popularity during the pandemic.

In early April, Piedmont Hospitals in the Atlanta area began offering micro grocery stores for employees. Piedmont Atlanta's Director of Hospitality, Mark Galvin, BA, MAOM, knew he wanted to show care and concern for all hospital staff. Galvin and other innovative Piedmont Hospitals realized the value of providing grocery accessibility for employees. Galvin says part of his motivation was "listening to everyone talk about how they could not find everyday items like paper towels, cleaning wipes, and bleach."

"Employees were stressing about their personal lives while trying to take care of really sick patients," he said.

Taking care of those that take care of others is a hospitality rule that Galvin holds dear. Since the hospital purchases in large quantities, it chose to pass volume savings on to staff. Employees enjoy the benefit of easy-access purchasing in their workplace

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without the hospital marking up items. With the addition of a micro market, Galvin was able to bring two employees back to work to manage the store. As in most segments of food service, lack of walk-in customers resulted in furloughs for healthcare foodservice employees. Visitors being prohibited in the hospital negatively impacted retail food sales.

Senior living campuses and CCRCs report utilizing three to five employees on average to bring the grocery store to the residents. Staff members are thankful to have the opportunity to work in these on-site markets and stay employed.

As the name implies, these micro markets do not carry a comprehensive product line, but instead focus mostly on basic items and convenience foods. Inventories can vary greatly from store to store, and the makeup of inventory during the pandemic may look different than the usual array of items available.

In senior living and CCRCs, groceries can be ordered online with electronic order forms or may be called in by the resident or their caregiver. Staff fills those orders and delivers items to residents within a window of 24-48 hours, sometimes quicker. Since commercial foodservice distributors do not have many packages in small sizes, some items may have to be weighed, packaged, and sealed with a food sealer into more modest quantities, better suited for resident use.

Healthcare locations have utilized various spaces for their on-site store. Creating a micro market with retail space requires an accessible site in an area well-traveled by people. In hospital cafeterias, space is often available in the shrinking footprint of the dining space. With limited or zero visitation, this currently makes for a viable option.

In contrast, with senior living campuses and CCRCs, delivery is currently the sole distribution method. Therefore, the location does not require a visible area. Communal dining or community event space is now available to set up a distribution operation.

NEW WORLD, NEW PRACTICES

This pandemic is challenging us all to think differently about the world in which we live, and about facility practices that can enhance the lives of employees and clients. We have a fresh opportunity to take better care of each other. Offering staff members and residents an easier, possibly safer, more convenient



STOCKING YOUR ON-SITE MARKET

An on-site market in a healthcare or senior living setting will look different in every facility, depending on the size and shape of the footprint, availability of refrigerator or freezer space, number of prospective clients, and other factors.

Markets can feature an array of food and non-food products including:

- Single-serve or grab-and-go items such as yogurt, chips, granola or protein bars, premade sandwiches, whole or cut fruits, and cut vegetables.
- Family-size prepackaged items that employees can pick up after their shift and take home and bake, or sandwich fixings like deli meats, cheeses, and breads.
- Dry goods, paper products, hand sanitizer, and limited cleaning supplies.

Items stocked should satisfy food needs throughout the day, as healthcare employees work various shifts. Consider the following:

- Breakfast items, such as fruit, yogurt, hardboiled eggs, muffins, granola bars, and other bakery items.
- Lunch offerings, including premade sandwiches, salads, power bowls, and soups.
- Dinner items, such as pizzas, pastas, hot sandwiches such as hamburgers, veggie burgers, or chicken sandwiches.
- Beverages for all hours of the day, including gourmet coffee, tea, milk, smoothies, flavored waters, and soft drinks.

Work with your supplier to help select products for your market and to assist in merchandising items.

way to obtain groceries is a small way to make a big difference in the lives of others. **E**

RESOURCES

- <https://www.cookinglight.com/news/grocery-store-hospital-market-on-the-green>
- <https://www.kxan.com/news/coronavirus/hospitals-open-pop-up-markets-so-employees-can-spend-time-at-home-not-the-grocery-store/>

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- On-site micro markets in healthcare centers can be a helpful solution for which of the following?
 - Patients
 - Vendors
 - Employees and customers
- Who is at risk when healthcare workers go to grocery stores directly after work?
 - Older adults
 - Grocery store employees
 - Older adults, store employees, the community
- While many businesses came to a screeching halt with the pandemic, which businesses demand for food and supplies increased?
 - Hospitals, schools, colleges
 - Hospitals, eldercare centers, military bases
 - Hospitals, eldercare centers, schools
- Besides being at risk for contracting coronavirus, healthcare employees are at risk for which of the following during the pandemic?
 - Burnout
 - Obesity
 - Diabetes
- How many employees does it take to provide a micro market on average?
 - 1-2
 - 3-5
 - 6-10
- An on-site market in a healthcare or senior living setting can stock
 - Single-serve and family-size prepackaged items
 - Dry goods and paper products
 - All of the above
- In current models, how long after placing a market order does it take for items to be delivered to the customer?
 - One week
 - Five business days
 - Generally 24-48 hours