

Infusing Restaurant Trends in the Non-Commercial Kitchen

CULINARY CONNECTION



Trends include clean labels, Pan-Asian and Middle Eastern cuisine, and food trucks

As the country rebounds from COVID-19 lockdowns, hospitals are opening retail food courts again. Senior living facilities and long-term care centers are opening to families and communal dining. With this reopening of retail segments in health care, it is evident that restaurant trends influence healthcare foodservice menus more than ever.

We are in an age when social media pages are filled with food photos from restaurants and home cooks. We now have many apps available to provide restaurant reservations, food reviews, and meal delivery. Much of this cultural shift can be attributed to foodies. The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines a “foodie” as a person having an avid interest in the latest food fads. The title of *foodie* is self-proclaimed and has grown into a mainstream consumer group. This consumer group is raising the food scene in all segments—including health care.

Within health care, food service is one of the most challenging operations to manage. Managing budgets, guest and employee expectations, and safe food served at proper temperatures in a limited timeframe create an increasing number of demands on foodservice directors and their staff.

The North American Association of Food Equipment Manufacturers (NAFEM) reports that 40 percent of residents and patients consider food options when choosing hospitals, senior living, or long-term care facilities. Their data reveals that 66 percent rank the food as important to their overarching opinions of the quality of care received. When food is delivered by friendly staff, on time, and is correct, almost two-thirds of patients rate the food as high quality.



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The push to remove processed or prepackaged ingredients from healthcare foodservice inventory is a driving force. All-natural clean food is in demand, with almost half of consumers seeking clean labels for health benefits. Making vegan, vegetarian, and plant-based proteins highly visible on the menu is a win for both operators and the consumers they serve. These once-optional meal choices are now a must. People are eating less meat, year on year, making plant-based proteins a menu requirement.

options and mirror what food would be available in the surrounding area. Pop-up restaurants enable diverse concepts. Whether it is an Italian Kitchen, a Southern Bar-B-Que, a Steak House, or a Fish Camp pop-up, it is a welcome change of menu and venue for the employees and patient families.

Pan-Asian and Middle Eastern cuisines are among the hottest new menu trends. Keep in mind that Pan-Asian is not the same as Asian Fusion. Pan-Asian menus are a blend

Similar to the trend in restaurants, on-demand ordering and delivery within a hospital encourages staff and patients to eat on premises. Just as people can now order ahead of time via a mobile app, this technology is being implemented in the healthcare market. QR (quick response) codes are now utilized for digital menus and contactless payment. The Coca-Cola Company announced in June 2021 that the QR code is now going to be their solution for the 52,000 Coca-Cola Freestyle dispensers that are in



CULINARY-FOCUSED FOOD

HALLS filled with fast-casual, made-to-order food is becoming the expectation. NAFEM reports that 81 percent of hospital patients and employees eat onsite.

Healthcare dining is moving away from tray lines, and warming pans are becoming obsolete. Culinary-focused food halls filled with fast-casual, made-to-order food is becoming the expectation. NAFEM's Healthcare Foodservice Stats You Need to Know document reports that 81 percent of healthcare consumers and employees eat onsite. When people eat in the same location daily, it is crucial to provide appealing

of Asian dishes from different countries. Fusion cuisines blend various elements to create a new combination. When developing a Pan-Asian menu, it is key to start with classic Asian dishes that use ingredients belonging to the same family. The goal is to create a short and diverse menu. Restaurants are adding elements such as Singapore rice noodles, Japanese soba noodles, and Pho noodles.

operations across the country. The QR code allows the drink combination to be created with the user's camera on their mobile phone.

In 2008, catering trucks, social media, and foodie's love of street food created the food truck revolution. The popularity of food trucks and street food has continued to grow. These trucks provide options ranging

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from mac and cheese, to dumplings, to donuts. This variety is where our healthcare centers and hospitals are starting to see benefits. Besides adding more versatility to food available on campus, some hospitals have found a solution to an age-old problem. Healthcare and hospital kitchens often close in the early evening, with cafeterias and food courts unavailable to staff, family, and patients in the evenings and overnight hours. By coordinating with various food trucks between key hours, hospitals can meet the needs of employees and families during those late hours. A common request today is a food truck “marketplace” from 10 p.m. until 2 a.m.

The variety of food trucks that can be utilized is almost limitless. Healthcare organizations such as hospitals, medical universities, and clinics are starting to join the trend. Operators quickly realize that these rolling foodservice operations can work for high-energy marketing functions and employee appreciation events. In times of emergencies or natural disasters, food trucks can double as a solution to feeding people when standard operations are limited or in limbo.

Healthcare leadership recognizes the data regarding foodservice satisfaction and how those outcomes directly impact the bottom line. For hospitals and medical centers, the HCAHPS (Hospital Consumer Assessment of Healthcare Providers and Systems) survey is the first national, standardized, publicly reported survey of patients’ hospital care perspectives. As reported by NAFEM, “a 5-point increase in a hospital’s rating, which includes foodservice ratings, correlates with a 1 percent increase in profit margins.”

Long-term care and senior living settings have an even clearer picture of outcomes. A reduction in census and difficulty in filling open beds can be directly correlated to challenged foodservice operations. The right supplies and equipment can positively impact care and improve margins.

Creating pop-up kitchens, innovative purchasing, or working with food trucks enables healthcare food service to provide creative and versatile menu solutions. Simply adding equipment such as combi-ovens, holding cabinets for cold and hot foods, food lockers, QR codes, premium grab-and-go refrigeration, display cabinets, ventless ovens, and induction cooktops can also elevate any foodservice operation. The purchase of one new piece of equipment quarterly or annually can significantly impact patient, family, and employee satisfaction by providing menu versatility. Additionally, an investment in premium food



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storage containers with gasket seal lids protects the acquisition of raw food. Purchasing the right piece of equipment can help optimize labor. This results in a more efficient kitchen operation and higher quality food.

When operators spend money on equipment and innovations, these purchases provide a return on investment for years to come. **E**

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This Level I article assumes that the reader has entry level knowledge of the topic. The desired outcome is to ensure a foundation of basic concepts of the subject matter.

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1. What is the definition of a *foodie*?
 - A. An obese person who eats a lot
 - B. A person that works in a restaurant
 - C. Someone with an avid interest in the latest food fads
2. What percentage of residents and patients consider food options when choosing hospitals, senior living, or long-term care facilities?
 - A. 25 percent
 - B. 40 percent
 - C. 12 percent
3. When food is delivered by friendly staff, on time, and is correct, what percentage of patients rate the food as high quality?
 - A. About half
 - B. Almost two-thirds
 - C. Almost one-third
4. What is a possible solution to feeding staff from 10 p.m. until 2 a.m.?
 - A. Hire staff to come in overnight
 - B. Extend kitchen hours until 2 a.m.
 - C. Contract with one or more food trucks
5. A 5-point increase in a hospital’s rating correlates with a _____ increase in profit margins.
 - A. 2 percent
 - B. 5 percent
 - C. 1 percent
6. Why would a center serve anything besides tea, juice, coffee, milk, and water?
 - A. To provide choices for residents
 - B. In case employees want something to drink
 - C. If you give many choices, you don’t have to provide beverages between meals
7. What percentage of residents and patients rank the food as important to their overarching opinion of the quality of care received?
 - A. 66 percent
 - B. 6 percent
 - C. 16 percent

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