

Savings & Solutions

AAHSA Group Purchasing & Shared Services

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Rethinking the dining experience in long term care

By Shellee Roloff, Foodservice Segment Manager – Direct Supply

There are several ways to drive a culture change in your community, but few as influential as elevating the dining experience. Since mealtime is an important time of the day for your residents, improving the dining experience can foster resident independence, enhance resident nourishment and encourage friendships.

You'll also see an increase in overall resident well-being and satisfaction in your community. And, since dining is a major influence on new residents when deciding where to live, it makes perfect sense to create the very best dining experience in your community to attract prospective residents.

To improve the way meals are presented and served in your community, it may be time to implement a new dining service. But before you do, consider how each dining service will affect your residents, staff and your overall foodservice efficiency.

Restaurant service empowers your residents and wins their loyalty

One of the hardest adjustments residents make when moving into a long term care community is losing the ability to make simple choices. By implementing restaurant service in your dining room, you can introduce choice back into your community and gain resident loyalty.

Why your residents will love it

With restaurant-style service, residents will be reminded every day of the importance your community places on their independence, flexibility and control over what they want. They'll be so impressed by this simple yet thoughtful effort, you can expect approval to resonate through your community long after the elimination of a more traditional program. Plus, sophisticated china, elegant flatware and cloth napkins can dress up your table-tops even more for a classy look sure to get noticed.

Why it will work in your community

Offering cook-to-order flexibility doesn't have to overwhelm your kitchen staff. Even a rotating menu with limited selections gives residents the ability to make their own meal choices, and adds variety to their day.

Other considerations for restaurant service

Fluorescent lighting can detract from the mood of your dining room. However residents shouldn't have to strain to see their food or navigate the dining area. Strike a balance by placing lighting fixtures over tables to give light where it's needed most.

Family-style dining fosters resident friendships without straining your staff

Family-style dining is an easy way to encourage resident friendships – and making friends is important to establishing a thriving community where residents want to live.

Why your residents will love it

A casual, familiar setting is particularly beneficial to new residents because it provides a comfortable way for them to make new friends and adjust to new surroundings. Family-style dining also allows residents to have more control over their food intake. They are able to serve themselves as much as they want of the foods they enjoy, and none of the foods they dislike.

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Why it will work in your community

Family-style dining is great for your kitchen staff because they can gain efficiencies in preparing larger batches of select items. In addition, prospective residents and their families will be impressed by the strong social bonds in your community, which are further strengthened with family-style dining.

Other considerations for family-style dining

Select serving pieces that are easy to pass. Serving pieces should also be light enough for residents to grasp with ease. Keep beverage refills handy tableside with insulated pitchers that feature tight-fitting lids to prevent spills.

Buffet dining adds variety to your residents' day

Residents can become bored with mealtime when it's the same routine day in and day out. A quick way to get residents excited about your dining experience is to introduce buffet dining.

Why your residents will love it

Similar to family-style dining, buffet dining is casual and fun. It also brings the wonderful smells, which normally stay in the kitchen, out to your residents. Buffet dining grants residents greater control over their choices and portions. To really spice things up for your residents, try a cuisine-themed buffet, a Sunday brunch, a summer picnic, a holiday feast – the possibilities are endless! You can also generate excitement by using a menu board for your upcoming buffet. In addition to chafing dishes to keep your buffet foods warm and appetizing, residents will enjoy made-to-order cook stations, perfect for omeletes, pancakes or even a meat carving station.

Why it works for your community

Occasional buffets can easily be set up by your staff in several locations: an existing dining room, common area or an activity room. What's more, your kitchen staff won't be overtaxed. A buffet can have as few as two main entrees and just a

handful of side items, which is much easier than preparing a full menu of made-to-order selections. You can also turn a simple, long table into a buffet line with the addition of an attractive tablecloth, preferably one that is stain resistant. Tables with fold-up legs can be easily transported to any area in your community for simple set up.

Room service adds a personalized touch that makes mealtime special

This type of service is usually supplementary to another program. It is customized for each resident, private and allows for more choice at mealtime. Plus, it is an effective way to serve bed-bound residents.

Why your residents will love it

Like restaurant service, this type of dining emphasizes the importance your community places on the residents' independence and ability to make their own choices at

mealtime. And, personalized attention goes a long way in making residents feel valued. Fine china, stainless steel domes, and elegant glassware and flatware further enhance the dining experience for your residents.

Why it will work in your community

A made-to-order menu doesn't have to burden your kitchen staff. Even rotating selections give residents the ability to make their own meal choices, and add variety to their day.



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Consider the Needs of Alzheimer's Residents at Mealtime

Caring for Alzheimer's residents presents many challenges and takes careful planning, especially during mealtime. To ensure Alzheimer's residents get the nutritional intake they need and enjoy a pleasant dining experience, you should consider everything from the dining environment to the menu itself.

Environment

Set the scene for a peaceful dining experience, so residents focus on mealtime, not on distractions.

- Be consistent with your furniture placement
- Play soft, relaxing music
- Use soothing colors on the walls, such as peach, pink, ivory, beige, lavender, and light blues and greens
- Use a flat paint instead of semi-gloss or high-gloss to decrease glare
- Consider carpet to reduce noise
- Avoid over-stimulation caused by a television, too many people or simply excessive noise
- Don't use flooring products that are shiny and cause glare

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Don't Pay for Features You Don't Use

Bed Retraction Features Keep Residents Safe

By Tom Sullivan, Contracting Consultant, Med-Mizer Inc.

Sub-Acute and Long Term Care facilities continue to face a rapidly changing environment. Patient acuity levels, enhanced patient survivability in acute healthcare and a growing population base of senior citizens complicate the resident base. Coupled with these issues, reimbursement, availability of trained healthcare professionals, and increasing quality care while decreasing costs, remains a challenge to administrators and staff. As the average age of the population continues to increase, this growing population will continue to consume an ever disproportional share of available healthcare resources. Equally, competition for skilled and trained caregivers will continue to increase, with no apparent or quick resolution.

To help offset these challenges, manufacturers continue to research and develop products that provide features to support caregiver productivity and enhance the resident's safety and independence. Sub-acute care communities are increasingly reviewing product that provides product features that focuses on both the caregiver and the resident/patient that provides a cost effective and reliable solution.

Finally, after careful review and evaluation, the facility purchases a product that best meets the needs of the resident and caregiver. They now face a very non-unique problem – one that exists in every acute and sub-acute facility, as well as every household and office in the United States. We pay for features that we don't use. We don't use the features because we never take the time to learn how to use them. Features are not benefits if they are not used. The simple fact is, whether in the home, office, hospital or nursing home, we simply do not take the time or, in fairness to some, have the time to learn. We are not trained to maximize the features that are offered – those features that will benefit productivity, safety and life cycle of the product!

Med-Mizer® Inc., brings resident care and caregiver effectiveness to a new level of safety, simplicity and productivity with the Retractabed®. Currently the retraction feature, offered by Med-Mizer, is a one of a kind in the sub-acute care industry, while incorporating auto-contour, High-Low, and therapeutic positioning with embedded controls in the med-support arm – easy access for the resident and caregiver at the point of need for both. The retraction feature allows the resident easy and safe access to their bedside cabinet, telephone and storage – a feature of safety and comfort for the resident thus reducing caregiver attention. High-Low position provides safety for patient falls in the low position while assisting residents/patient's egress. The high position also permits better resident access and transportation, reducing staff related stress and back injury.

The three position med-support arm is specifically designed to provide ideal assistance and safety to the resident / patient and the caregiver. The low position allows unobstructed access to residents and for stretcher transfers. The normal guarded position (middle) provides protection without restraint and offers

pleasant arm chair environment when contoured, with easy access to bed positioning controls. The third position (high) provides the resident with an easy and stable means of entering and exiting the bed. The Med-Support Arm complies with all entrapment zones.

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Place Setting

Make sure residents are easily guided to their meals for greater nutritional intake.

- Keep the table setting simple
- Clear the table of items that may distract residents
- Avoid patterned plates and tablecloths
- Use contrast between the color of your food, the color of the plate and the tablecloth
- A majority of residents, many who don't suffer from Alzheimer's, are visually impaired and contrasting colors help them to identify where the food is, which in turn increases their nutritional intake
- Consider substituting a bowl for a plate, or using a plate guard to help residents eat more easily
- Use spoons with large handles instead of forks. Provide only the needed utensils to prevent distractions
- Use a travel mug or spill-proof cup for soup and beverages

Menu

Tailor your menu to make meals easier for residents to eat.

- Serve smaller meals more often, rather than three large meals a day
- Try placing just one type of food at a time on the plate to avoid distraction
- Residents with Alzheimer's are most alert and hungry in the morning
- Offer more food at breakfast or serve several breakfasts
- Serve finger foods such as cheese, small sandwiches, kabobs, fresh fruits or vegetables
- Sandwiches made with pita bread are easier for residents to grasp
- Put condiments on food before serving it
- Serve soft foods such as applesauce, cottage cheese or scrambled eggs
- Bring tantalizing smells into the dining room to increase residents' appetites

Meal Time

Make the process less burdensome to ease resident frustrations with mealtime.

- Use straws that bend for drinking
- To help residents catch on to the motion of eating, place the fork or spoon in their hand and help guide the utensil to their mouth