

# Empowering Healthcare Employees to Make Healthier Lifestyle Choices

A sustainable and integrated wellness program that supports healthier lifestyles for hospital employees both inside and outside the work setting.

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**—Tonya Smith, FACHE**  
Vice President, Operations  
Winchester Medical Center  
Winchester, Va.

As hospitals strive to improve the health of their patient populations, paradoxically, healthcare employees tend to be less healthy than the average U.S. worker. A 2011 study by Thomson Reuters found that healthcare workers spend 10 percent more on healthcare and consume more medical services than the rest of the national workforce.

Winchester (Va.) Medical Center (WMC)—a 445-bed, non-profit hospital that is one of six hospitals that comprise the Valley Health System—recognized the need to bridge the gap between the health of hospital workers and the overall U.S. workforce.

“Healthcare organizations across the country are shifting their focus to wellness and prevention,” says Tonya Smith, FACHE, vice president, operations, Winchester Medical Center. “We are committed to that principle not only on behalf of patients in our community, but also for our employees who are part of that community as well.”

To that end, Smith and her colleagues, both at the WMC site and Valley Health System, wanted to develop proactive lifestyle initiatives that would engage employees in meaningful change.

At the system level, Valley Health implemented an employee wellness program called “Healthy U.” A vital part of Valley Health’s overall benefits program, it includes an annual member health assessment, biometric screenings, and face-to-face health coaching and goal-setting sessions. To support the program, medical fitness centers are located at all six Valley Health hospitals. Free weight-loss classes are offered to all insured employees, and the system provides a free smoking cessation program as well as stress management and self-care programs.

But leaders at Valley Health wanted to take this systemwide commitment one step further by examining its on-site nutritional offerings and support for employees and visitors. The health system sought the expertise of its long-time partner, Aramark, the global provider of food, facilities management and uniforms services, which has been providing support in patient and retail food services, environmental and patient transport services and biomedical engineering to Valley Health hospitals for several years.

“We knew Aramark had robust health and wellness experience in programs for K–12 educational institutions as well as universities and businesses,” says Valley Health’s Smith. “Given that Aramark has more than 750 dietitians and hundreds of chefs and other experts who have the knowledge and experience to help people live healthier lives, it seemed natural for us to partner with them so they could help us advance our goal of creating a healthy food environment for our employees.”

Aramark’s Healthy for Life™ platform—which had already been successfully introduced to 2.5 million college and university students and also at hundreds of other Aramark client locations—was a perfect complement to the culture of wellness already being developed through Valley Health’s Healthy U.



Aramark's program provides a sustainable and integrated approach that features healthy food options, nutrition education and wellness offerings with a broad selection of tasty recipes alongside easy-to-understand nutrition information.

"Our mission is to enrich and nourish lives, and our Healthy For Life™ platform brings that mission to life, empowering people to make nutritionally sound decisions about what they eat," says Victor Crawford, COO, Aramark Healthcare. "Healthy for Life™ includes a wide variety of solutions that work together to help consumers lead healthier lifestyles."

Healthy For Life™ features several integrated elements:

- A healthy food environment that features a broad selection of great tasting foods and beverages, with nutritional information that enables employees to find choices that fit their lifestyles
- Educational materials, ranging from newsletters and brochures to "ask-the-dietitian" programs that support

employees both at WMC and in their daily lives outside of the hospital with their families and friends

- Healthy marketing promotions and features that encourage "better-for-you" choices all throughout the year
- Special programs such as health fairs, food samplings, cooking demonstrations and workshops, plus online and social media programs that continuously engage employees with a culture of wellness

At Valley Health's WMC, sales for "better-for-you" options are skyrocketing as well as overall sales in the hospital's retail dining services. The biggest hit in the Healthy for Life™ offering has been fresh sushi, with WMC selling more than 3,000 sushi rolls in one month. Furthermore, the combination of the health system's Healthy U and Aramark's Healthy for Life™ has been so successful that it earned WMC the prestigious Gold Apple Award from the Virginia Hospital & Healthcare Association and Prevention Partners for providing and promoting healthy, affordable and delicious food and beverage options for employees and visitors.

"One of the keys to our success was partnering with Aramark, who could incorporate their nutritional expertise and programs with our Healthy U offering," says Valley Health's Smith. "They took their standardized, effective and proven platform and tailored the components to meet the needs of our health system. It's these kinds of partnerships that will be critical to keeping our communities and our organizations healthy in a new era of healthcare."

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