

Hospital Food Gets Healthy, Tasty Upgrade

By Christina Johnson | October 29, 2014

UC San Diego Health and more than 300 hospitals across the nation recently celebrated Food Day by serving antibiotic-free beef and poultry to in-patient and cafeteria customers. The national effort, led by organizations such as [Health Care Without Harm](#), attempts to bring greater public awareness to the rising number of antibiotic-resistant infections and their link to the overuse of antibiotics in farm animals raised for food.

Antibiotic-resistant “superbugs” are responsible for an estimated 23,000 deaths each year, eight million hospital stays and \$55 billion in health care costs and lost productivity, according to San Diego County Childhood Obesity Initiative, which is partnering with local hospitals to promote Food Day goals related to health and health care.



Chris McCracken and Jill Uhlman of Food and Nutrition Services.

As part of the Healthier Hospitals Initiative, UC San Diego Health has pledged to reduce the amount of meat it purchases for its hospital food services by 20 percent over the next three years. In addition, all its hamburger patties are now sourced entirely from grass-fed, antibiotic-free cows.

The move away from factory-farmed meats is just one component of a broader set of planet-friendly, health-conscious culinary upgrades underway at UC San Diego Health.

These upgrades include serving more locally grown, in-season fruits and vegetables, joining the “locavore” movement, posting “rethink your drink” flyers near beverage stations to educate the public about the

health consequences of excessive sugar consumption and an expansion of low-fat, whole-foods and plant-based meal selections. The serving sizes of some dishes have also been reduced. There are fewer sugary, high-fat dessert options.

To prove that healthy, sustainable food can also be delicious, UC San Diego Health has also hired a new executive chef, trained in haute French cuisine and recruited from the Hotel Del Coronado.

“We are really proud of the changes that are underway,” said Christopher McCracken, director of nutritional services, who is spearheading many of the menu upgrades. “You really have to try our vegetable napoleon (a colorful stack of roasted vegetables atop a polenta medallion). I am really proud of it. It’s amazingly flavorful. You would not know it is healthy.”

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