



## **Dietary Management Magazine – May 2006**

### **“Software Automation Strategies in Foodservice Operations”**

In a world of growing resident and family demands and expectations, met by increased budgetary constriction, healthcare foodservice and clinical administrators are faced with a unique challenge. How can I continue to reduce food and labor costs, increase productivity, and still present new and exciting meal service approaches and menu offerings to my customers? The only solution, proven time and time again, is through effective, seamlessly integrated, automated solutions.

Technical terms and jargon, even software in and of itself, can often seem daunting...even scary to some. The key is to look at automation, in all its forms (i.e. kitchen equipment, software, hardware, Point-of-Sale systems), as a managerial extension of you and your team. Imagine being able to know, instantaneously, your forecasted resident or guest count at all times, exactly what you are serving in every dining facility and for every modified diet, your food cost per meal served, per meal, day, week, month, or for a date range of your selection, exactly what needs to be ordered for your next delivery with appropriate quantities (and the ability to do price point comparisons between vendors), and the value of your existing on-hand inventory. All at once. Seem simple? Let's take this a little further...what if you also knew, all the time,

your precise cost of over-production, what Mrs. Jones on Floor 2, West Wing liked, didn't like, and was allergic to, what nourishments she needed and when, and what she is not allowed to eat from your standard house menu due to Dr. Smith's new diet order placed this morning? Foodservice management and patient care software solutions provides you and your team with this knowledge.

In the hospitality industry, and even more so in healthcare foodservice, this knowledge amounts to freedom. It provides the freedom to spend less time aggregating all this data, and more time with residents or staff, or assessing new profitable ventures.

Healthcare facilities, comprised of profit centers and cost centers, have often assigned foodservice as being a cost center in overall productivity and operations. Due to advancements in automation, this perspective may now be transformed into a more positive light. It is true that residents are still fed, and there is a direct correlation between this responsibility and expense, however, how many additional revenue streams are now available that were not previously, through the use of automated solutions?

With the development of web and kiosk based ordering, guests can now go to kiosks placed strategically in the facility and order the food they want, on demand, to either be picked up in a retail outlet, or delivered to their resident's room? Healthcare staff can order menu items from their desktop. Imagine the increased revenue not previously realized that now becomes available due to advanced technology solutions. How many guest trays are currently not being charged for, and what percentage of floor stocks are consumed by guests, when they could be purchasing those same items in your

cafeteria or retail outlets? Additionally, there are in-room entertainment systems that allow patients to order meals from their television, that have already been cross-referenced with their likes, dislikes, allergies and dietary restrictions, instead of requiring dietary staff to take orders at bedside. The possibilities are endless!

For operations using spoken menu, or offering tableside service in the dining room, imagine your team geared with wireless tablets or PDAs, enabling them to place meal requests instantly, without needing to manually log them, then re-enter all the data.

Automation greatly reduces duplication of efforts on every level, from submitting meal requests and placing food orders with distributors, to taking inventory and beyond.

Not only should operations consider where they could be making money, yes even in long-term care but where they could be saving it as well. Long-term Care facilities find an average food cost reduction of 15%, through using the software to accurately forecast resident and guest counts, standardize recipes and menus, and order the appropriate quantities of food as a result. It reduces the amount of standing inventory, further preventing wasted costs from spoilage. The average automated healthcare facility realizes increases in their annual inventory turnover by 20%. If your annual inventory is \$100,000, hypothetically, imagine having an additional \$20,000 to reinvest in new equipment, or add a new service or higher cost items to your menu, all while promoting the quality of your services.

The tools and benefits from foodservice automation are truly endless...it's just a matter of finding the solutions that fit best within the culture of your environment. Most crucial in the decision to purchase food management or nutrition care automation is finding one

that is truly integrated, to reduce redundancy and duplication of efforts. Software, and the data gathered from it, should be easy to use and comprehend, and should ultimately be the most dependable member of your team. When looking for the best solution for your operation, it is imperative that you have a thorough understanding of its capabilities. Finding the best software solution is no small feat, and each operation should seriously analyze and compare available solutions to ensure that the one you select will meet your specific needs.