Implementing Room Service as Seen Through the Eyes of a Chef: Considerations Prior to Implementing a Room Service Program
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**Why Room Service?**

Let’s be clear, it is not a new concept. Many hospitals used it early on for private floors. However, in keeping it small, hospitals missed out on immense opportunities. For starters, room service empowers patients to decide what type of food they want and when to order it, something revolutionary in the healthcare sector.

Furthermore, society is obsessed with food. It’s probably one aspect in life that gets people excited. Whether through celebrity chefs, world cuisines, cooking shows, or magazines, people care about the food they eat; a fact that should also be extended to hospitals.

So now the question becomes, “How can better food affect patients?”

In the past, while a necessity, food only played a small role in patient treatment. Yet, with society’s emphasis on what individuals put into their bodies, it has become a dominant factor in the healing process. And what room service does in this process is provide patients with healthy options and education opportunities. Also, because hospital reimbursements are tied to patient satisfaction scores, their care is all-the-more important.

If you don’t have a room service program and your hospital is giving it serious thought, you might wonder what should you consider prior to implementing it.

**We Will Let a Chef Tell You What You Need to Know**

We introduce Mark Dyball: executive chef, principal consultant, and owner of [Healthcare Culinary Solutions™](#). With three decades of experience in the culinary arts and 25 years specialized in healthcare, Mark brings unparalleled understanding of the industry, helping to revolutionize the culinary experience for modern-day hospitals. In addition, Mark has implemented room service programs through his work as a consultant.

In 2013, he established Healthcare Culinary Solutions (HCS) to better service his vision of high quality culinary experiences for all hospital patients. HCS specializes in helping foodservice departments with their menu development, marketing their services, developing a room service program, improving their revenues, and a host of other offerings.
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Mark Dyball and Computrition teamed up to impart our extensive knowledge in this eBook about the do’s and don’ts of the room service implementation process along with the benefits of software automation.

What it Takes to Implement a Room Service Program

There is no illusion, implementing a room service program is hard work and will likely turn your department upside down for a bit. The decision to switch to room service should not be taken lightly, but with much thought and consideration. It’s like building a new house: it sounds exciting but when you sit down and go through all the components needed to complete the project, it feels daunting.

So where to begin? First, ask yourself, “Should I even go through with this project?” By making this assessment ahead of time, you can prevent lost time, effort and money. Such resources could be allocated elsewhere and benefit your department just as much, or possibly more, than your original plan. Also, don’t be afraid to seek help. Whether through internal services or an outside consultant, their assessment can also impact your decision.
Things like labor needs, equipment requirements, physical space, stakeholders buy-in and software are all necessary in the assessment process. With that being said, another question to ask is, “Can your department withstand the challenges of this new program?” Because a change in physical space, equipment and/or staffing isn’t helpful when the foundation of the department is shaky or unable to handle the pressure of a room service project. So before sinking hundreds of thousands of dollars into a program like room service, consider some of the following questions with regard to your department.

1. Where does the staff morale stand?
2. Do you have a clear leadership strategy?
3. Are clear lines of communication in place?
4. Is the department financially sustainable?
5. Do you have a strong culinary program?
6. Are you utilizing the department’s software systems to its fullest potential?
7. How would you grade the department’s customer service?
8. Does the department have a training strategy?
9. Do we have adequate staffing?

If the answers to these questions are positive, then you are ready for room service. However, if all or some of the answers are negative, you will need to address them before starting any work.

Getting Help

Implementing room service is a complicated process and it’s always wise to seek help. Start by talking to your peers within the industry. They will give you some insight into implementing a room service program. Also, visit existing room service sites and try to match the size of the operation to your own. Some helpful questions to ask when comparing sites can be:

1. What were the increases in labor costs?
2. What equipment and physical space changes had to be made?
3. What was the equipment budget?
4. Did local or state entities get involved?
5. What talent existed within the culinary team? And if that talent did not exist what actions did they take to improve this situation?
6. What effect did the room service program have on the department and the staff morale?
7. What was the department's experience with the software and the software company?
8. What training programs had to be introduced and who implemented them?
9. Did the department employ a consulting company to help with the room service implementation?

Probably one of the biggest decisions to make is whether to hire a room service consulting company. While some foodservice departments try to do it alone, consulting with an outside company brings a wealth of knowledge. They can assist with timelines, menu & recipe development, policy & procedures, equipment & layout recommendations, a room service manual, dietetic knowledge and even training programs. So much of the stress from implementing a room service program can be alleviated simply by getting help!

With that being said, it is also important to choose a consulting company that will fit your organization's core principles and values. Each group has its own philosophy on room service, especially menu development. Always ask to talk to essential people like the executive chefs and determine if their menu philosophy aligns with
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Worthwhile tasks, like doing your research beforehand, could have big pay offs in the long run and lead to a smoother program implementation.

Building a Strong Culinary Team

The word “culinary” is not usually associated with healthcare foodservice. However, with the advent of room service, the term has been put at the forefront of foodservice departments, and rightly so. With food as the business, the goal now is to bring nutritious, tasty and well-presented food to the patient population.

So how do we upgrade our foodservice? By changing mindsets toward hospital food to think more in the realm of providing patients with a culinary experience as opposed to simply eating food for nourishment. Regardless of age and illness, patients are people after all with specific preferences and expectations. Some may even demand a higher quality of service.

Keep that in mind and have a culinary program at the center of your foodservice operation. It’s necessary. Here are six aspects that should be included.

1. **Menu and Recipe Development** – Design menus around your patient base. Seeking out new trends within the hospitality trade and implement them in a healthcare setting. Use metrics such as patient surveys to drive your menus. Enhance your recipe development by using existing software systems or purchase new software systems. This will give your culinary program
greater scope on nutritionals, ordering, data control and product pricing.

2. **Culinary Leadership** - Employing an executive chef will bring many benefits to your culinary program, but it’s important that he or she has an excellent understanding of the following points: food knowledge, production management responsibilities, production procedures, customer service, leadership skills and most of all passion for the culinary arts.

3. **Production Procedures** – For a culinary program to succeed, a production unit must be well organized and have certain structures in place like a culinary team, job routines, daily & weekly production sheets, culinary standards, portion & waste control sheets and weekly kitchen sanitation inspections. All of these elements must be organically ingrained in the daily routine of the culinary team.

4. **Culinary Training** – An ongoing culinary training program administrated by the executive chef is a crucial element to any program’s success story. Training should cover basic skills like cooking methods, include discussions on the latest food industry trends and even take field trips to vendor’s facilities.

5. **Scratch Cooking Methods** – Use fresh ingredients and control the nutritional value of the product. In doing so, patients will have healthy food choices and healthcare expenses can simultaneously decrease.
6. **Culinary Recruitment** – Search for culinary trained cooks with a seasoned background in the restaurant and hotel trade. While they may be harder to retain, provide new recruits with opportunities for personal and career growth within the established culinary program.

As you can see, the culinary program is the heart and soul of any Food and Nutrition department and can certainly play an important role in patient recovery. Along with that is the care patients receive while in a facility. Both of which are essential and will impact their healing process.

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**The Importance of Guest Service Within a Room Service Program**

Guest service, like any service, starts with the genuine enjoyment of doing something well for the benefit of other people. The epitome of this service should be warm, gracious and attentive during the patient’s stay.

Whether it’s an attitude, behavior or innate trait, it should be a primary motivation when caring for patients with the aim of leaving each guest with an experience far exceeding their expectations of a room service operation.

By providing a memorable experience to patients, one that can be shared with friends and family, it not only contributes to a positive healing process, but also increases the likelihood of them using your facility again, if ever needed.

On the contrary, poor service can damage the reputation of a room service program. A guest can forgive mediocre cuisine, but will communicate their disappointment of bad service. Here are a few ways to ensure they receive the best service possible.

1. **Establish guest service mission & vision statements** that are concise and organic to the department’s core values.

2. **Build guest-focused partnerships** through direct lines of communication, product focus groups, and guest surveys.

3. **Create regular guest service training programs** to hone the employee guest skills. Use the department’s communication
boards and weekly meetings to reiterate the importance of guest service.

4. Establish guest room service guidelines and expectations, seeking input from all parties of the department.

5. Build a sound communication system between all units of the nutrition department, allowing the guest service program to work seamless across the board.

Automation Can Make Room Service Implementation Easier

Room service is not an easy task. There are many factors to consider and steps to take, especially with patient satisfaction so important to hospitals. Implementation must be done right or you run the risk of negatively impacting patients and the overall operation.

What can make the process easier and even lead to a successful implementation is automating your room service program with software. A heightened level of flexibility, automation expands traditional meal service by enhancing patient ordering through an assortment of menu options. In addition, offering menus in different formats, like every day (repeating) room service, restaurant style or a cycle menu with daily specials, provides variety for patients and can help increase satisfaction.

Moreover, with advanced technology impacting industries like healthcare, hospitals are expected to stay ahead of the curve and incorporate innovation into their day-to-day workflow. Such on-demand ordering automation like bedside or TV meal ordering not only make taking orders easier for staff, but also give patients an experience similar to what they are already used to outside of a hospital, making your facility a much more attractive option amongst competitors.

What About Patient Health and Safety?

We all know most people like having options, specifically when it comes to food. However, having an array of choices, particularly in a hospital setting, can come with its fair share of challenges. For example, ordering meals is far more complex than doing so at a normal restaurant. Food does not depend solely on preference. Allergy and dietary restrictions must be considered when taking a patient’s order. With that being said, having information available
for staff at the time of meal placement is essential and one of the many benefits that can come from automating.

To expand, room service software can flag likes, dislikes and allergies (LDAs) and correct menus for patients who are classified as non-room service eligible. It can also do nutritional analysis like patient meal intake calculations, print nourishment labels and identify individuals who have yet to place an order. These features, to name a few, act as a safeguard against patients receiving incorrect meals that could potentially put their health at risk.

Another key factor that must be taken into account is monitoring the meal trays themselves. Room service allows for patients to order meals on-demand and it is imperative hospitals have a system in place that tracks tray location at all times and stages of delivery. One of the quickest ways to upset a patient is to deliver food at the wrong time.

By automating, hospitals can also do more than solely keep track of trays. For example, wristband scanning provides a huge safety advantage as tray location is not only monitored, but through advanced technology, a patient receives the right tray for their diet. Thus, preventing mix-ups that could potentially harm patients.

Additionally, users can receive alerts when individuals do not meet standard delivery times, run detailed reports and much more. The possibilities are endless!

And Your Organization's Performance?

Not only does automation ensure patients receive the right food at the right time, it also helps enhance the performance of your room service program as a whole.

Its checklist-like functionality helps users confirm that every detail of implementation, from staff training to sampling menu ideas, is included. Additionally, room service automated software allows for quick access to item information like costing, nutrient links, inventory, brands and revenue because
everything is in one place. System maintenance has never been easier.

And the less time your staff spends dealing with system issues, the more time they have caring for patients (and possibly boosting satisfaction scores!).

**Don’t Forget About Revenue!**

Did you know that room service software can also increase revenue? That’s right, more profitability for your facility. Through production control features that determine quantity of trays produced per production interval and reporting on things like recipe costs and inventory, users can prevent over-production and wasted food.

Additionally, hospitals can sell guest trays and promote specialty menu items. Not only does this help with patient satisfaction, since a majority of people have visitors with them, but it also gives hospitals more ways to generate revenue. Meaning a profitable environment for everyone involved.

**Automate Today**

So, if you’re interested in transforming your patient meal service into one that provides individuals with an exceptional experience, consider implementing room service software. Every hospital has the potential and you’ll see how much easier it makes life as you navigate through the room service process!

**Now, Are You Ready for Room Service?**

There are many advantages to consider when implementing a room service program, if approached in the correct manner, it will certainly bring many benefits to your department, such as:

1. Increased patient satisfaction scores through an elevated guest service and menu
2. Helping you stand out amongst the competition with a quality culinary program and highly-skilled staff
3. Improved department morale
4. Better cost control

While these benefits are worth every minute of time spent implementing room service, remember it all comes down to if your department has a strong enough foundation. And if that is the case, welcome to the club and have fun!

About Computrition

Since its inception in 1980, Computrition’s core objective has been to provide industry-leading, comprehensive software solutions to support food and nutrition professionals and to promote the quality, efficiency and safety of their operations in the healthcare industry.

Our flagship solution, Hospitality Suite, is a powerful automation system that is being used by customers to decrease costs, improve revenue, and increase patient satisfaction.

Computrition is based out of Los Angeles, California with satellite offices throughout the United States and Canada. We are composed of dietitians, former foodservice directors, IT professionals, and former clients who understand the needs of our customer base. In short, we know what you are looking for in a healthcare foodservice software system because we are a company of professionals who are just like you.
We offer automated solutions for the following:

- Foodservice
- Nutrition Service
- Point-of-Sale
- Room Service
- Tray Tracking
- Floor Stocking
- Touch Screen Menu Selections
- TV Meal Ordering
- Web Recipes and Web Menus
- Online Meal Ordering
- Food Labeling
- Bedside Meal Ordering via Mobile Device
- Call Center
- Employee Account Management

Call us at (800) 222-4488 or go to http://www.computrition.com/contact-us to find out more about our solutions.

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- **Case Studies**: [http://www.computrition.com/read-our-case-studies](http://www.computrition.com/read-our-case-studies)
- **eBooks and Other Resources**: [http://www.computrition.com/resources/ebooks-and-other-resources](http://www.computrition.com/resources/ebooks-and-other-resources)
About Healthcare Culinary Solutions

Healthcare Culinary Solutions helps hospitals adapt to changing palates, higher service expectations and restricted nutrition budgets – applying our pleasing, profit-generating solutions to your existing equipment and staffing structure. We draw on decades of experience in exceptional customer service, dietetics, classical culinary training, and food dynamics to build our proven track record of increasing customer participation and revenue within healthcare foodservice units across North America. Learn more about us at http://healthcareculinarysolutions.com/.