The Food Donation Program of the South Texas Veterans Health Care System - Nutrition and Food Services Department in San Antonio, Texas

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What’s the Deal with Throwing Away Good Food?

- Background in cooking
- Previous service with the US Peace Corps
- Trained at the Houston VA Internship Program
- Working at the San Antonio VA Hospital since 1993, first clinical, then administrative dietitian
- Non-select Menus with Cook-Chill System
- Always asking WHY and WHY NOT?
Thinking Outside the Garbage Can...

- Joined national VA Nutrition and Food Services GEMS committee and learned about changes in legislation regarding food donation by federal facilities.
- Discussed with chief of service and food service staff who would be involved.
- Contacted local food bank to discuss what programs they had running in the area.
Second Servings

- National program/movement by food banks around the country to utilize prepared foods from facilities with safe food handling practices (i.e., hotels, resorts, grocery stores, restaurants) for shelters
- First hospital in the San Antonio area to participate
“Now concentrate on the swinging pocket watch...You are getting sleepy...very sleepy...”

- Talking others into the idea
- Formal proposal to Front Office/Director of Facility
- Wow-easier than expected
Getting Started and Keepin’ On
Keepin’ On

- Our process
- How our food service staff has felt about it
- Things that have worked...and things that have not!
We track annual donations from Oct thru Sept:

- 2010: 14,795 pounds (or ~11,550 meals)
- 2012: 16,587 pounds (or ~12,960 meals)
  - Increase from donated “juice” and a facility-wide food drive added an extra 2,654 pounds of food and 33 cases of water
- **2013:** 12,707 pounds (or ~9,927 meals)
- 2014: 4,294 pounds (~3,392 meals)
- 2015: 7,217 pounds (~5,637 meals)
- 2016: 4,396 pounds (~3,434 meals)
In 2016 the South Texas Health Care System was awarded the Practice Greenhealth “Emerald” Award for significantly diverting at least 50% of the non-hazardous solid waste (this includes the food waste).

This was achieved through the hard work, leadership and coordination of our GEMS Team.

And... although the food donation counts toward our facility recycling efforts, it feels really, really good to NOT throw away nutritious foods and drinks.
Future Plan

• Going to a mainly select menu which significantly cut down food waste (donation)
• Continue to hold food drives several times a year (“How to Lose Weight for the Holidays”)
• Look for creative ways to utilize all types of items
• Encourage other facilities to get involved
Thank you, Thank you very much

-Elvis Presley

Questions (other than the meaning of life)?

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