

A Day in the Life of a Cafeteria Supervisor

Jan Wilkes, Food and Nutrition Services

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Most chefs will admit there's more to preparing meals than simply mixing ingredients together. **This is especially true in a hospital kitchen.**

While it's important for Elmhurst Memorial Hospital (EMH) to create appetizing meals, there's complexity behind providing patients with three nutritious meals a day and serving the 9,000 people who come through the cafeteria each week.

"When I was hired to work in Food and Nutrition Services, I was told something that stuck with me," said Jan Wilkes. "I was told, 'Patients are counting on you to get them well. This job is as important as any other because patients can't get well without us.'"

Three decades later, Wilkes clings to that philosophy as cafeteria food production senior supervisor. "I really took it to heart," she said. "My goal is to make sure patients receive quality food on a clean plate."

Breakfast

6:30 am – 10:30 am

Wilkes slips on her signature invisible hairnet and starts working toward her goal of providing nutritious meals well before the 6:30 a.m. opening of the cafeteria. While readying the cafeteria, Wilkes and her co-workers also oversee the preparation of meals for patients. Both are daunting jobs, but preparing patient meals is especially complicated. It involves coordination with dietitians and nurses to ensure that doctors' orders are followed. It also requires precise timing to make certain that patients who take medications with food receive their meals promptly.

"Patients, doctors and nurses all depend on us," Wilkes said. "If we're late, it's a major inconvenience."

Lunch

11 am – 2 pm

Wilkes and the food service workers then have 30 minutes to clean the cafeteria, wash dishes and brace for the lunch rush while coordinating and preparing lunches for patients. Now, Wilkes focuses on other tasks ranging from setting cafeteria menus to ordering meat and dairy for meals. But if things are hectic, she could be getting her hands dirty. "If we're short-handed, I might be working alongside the cafeteria workers scraping dishes and serving food," she said.

Dinner

4:45 pm – 7 pm

Attention shifts to mid-afternoon "snack time" and dinner, which means that the cleaning and meal preparation process is repeated. The end of Wilkes' shift is near, so she ensures that everything is in order before she leaves. In her absence, dinner is prepared and distributed, and by the time the 1:30 a.m. – 4 a.m. night shift is over, Wilkes is back for another day.

"The days seem to fly by," Wilkes said. "I had no idea about the complexity of hospital food services until I started working in it – and it still surprises me after 34 years."



250,812
The number of eggs served per year.



468,000
The number of people who eat at the EMH cafeteria each year.



Fruit Bread
A popular item in the EMH cafeteria, fruit bread is among the bakery items offered daily in the cafeteria.



250,000
The number of meals prepared for EMH patients each year.



1.5 million
The pounds of product delivered to the kitchen each year.



Pancit
A Filipino noodle dish that is among the most popular meals served in the cafeteria.



30
How many gallons of soup each of the kitchen's three kettles can hold.



46,713
The portions of turkey served each year.



275,600
The number of half-pints of milk used each year.