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# Hospital's Switch to Online Patient Dining Menus Improves Efficiency and Patient Satisfaction

**Allen's interactive menus save Phelps 8,700 staff hours annually and contribute to Phelps' HCAHPS rating 14% higher than benchmarks.**

## How We Did It

Phelps Memorial Hospital sought a more efficient and patient-friendly way to deliver its room dining menus. Maintenance and upkeep of printed menu books required valuable staff time, and patients could not access the menu books from their beds without calling for assistance.

Phelps wanted a better way to produce, update and deliver dining menus to patients – one that minimized staff intervention, and improved patients' ability to view and order menu items at their convenience. The hospital turned to Allen's interactive patient engagement system already in use on its bedside touchscreen units to solve both challenges.

**Phelps Hospital**
Northwell Health℠

Phelps Memorial Hospital Center, located in Sleepy Hollow, New York, is a 238-bed nonprofit acute-care hospital providing health care to Westchester and surrounding counties.

*"I knew the Allen system could solve this. The response was tremendous. People love it."*

**Patients can access Phelps Room Service Menu by clicking on the icon on the main interactive screen on their bedside touchscreen monitor.**

R unning a food service operation is not a hospital's core business – but any hospital administrator knows how critical that service line is to key hospital metrics such as patient satisfaction, quality improvement, operational efficiency and revenue.

Impacting those measures was the goal behind Phelps Memorial Hospital's most recent patient engagement technology initiative: converting its paper-based patient dining menus to online room menus using Allen Technologies' E3 Patient Engagement Solutions on bedside touchscreen monitors.

## The Challenge of Printed Menus: Hard to Maintain, Hard to Use

Previously, Phelps' patient menus were presented in large restaurant-style menu books which were a challenge to maintain and unwieldy for patients. "Constant inventory, inspection, replacement and sanitizing for infection control purposes needed to be performed to ensure all menus were present, presentable and sanitary," says Andrea Hodges, hospitality manager for the nonprofit acute-care hospital in Sleepy Hollow, New York.

"In addition, there was not a convenient place for the menu book at the bedside, causing it to be either at a distance or in a place that was not easily accessible. Patients would have to ring for assistance, requiring a staff member to be deployed for such a simple task," or get up from bed themselves, says Hodges, neither ideal from an operational efficiency or patient safety standpoint.

Infection control was another ongoing challenge with the printed menus. A 2011 study published in the *American Journal of Nursing* found that paper-based hospital documents can be a hotbed for hospital germs transferred from hands to paper and back to hands. Depending on the environmental room conditions, the researchers noted, bacteria could survive for up to a week in sufficient quantities to cause infection.
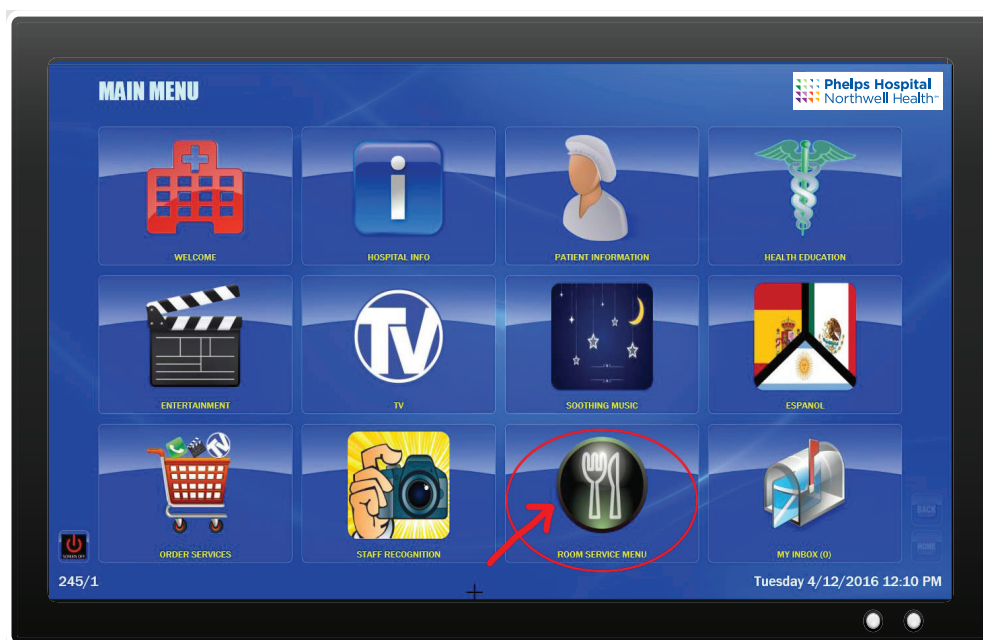
To counter that concern, infection control best practices required Phelps' housekeeping staff to disinfect each menu book daily. "Our staff was spending five to seven minutes per book, cleaning the front and back covers daily and every page after each discharge," says Hodges. With 238



MAIN MENU

Phelps Hospital
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WELCOME | HOSPITAL INFO | PATIENT INFORMATION | HEALTH EDUCATION

ENTERTAINMENT | TV | SOOTHING MUSIC | ESPANOL

ORDER SERVICES | STAFF RECOGNITION | ROOM SERVICE MENU | MY INBOX (0)

245/1 | Tuesday 4/12/2016 12:10 PM

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## Breakfast Can Be *ORDERED* From 6:30am – 6:30pm

**Breakfast Offerings Made to Order:**

Choice of 2 eggs, sunny side up, over easy, over well, scrambled or hard cooked

One egg available upon request

**Two Low-Cholesterol Scrambled Eggs ♥**
*Just as great as the original but with no cholesterol for our heart healthy guests*

**2 Home-made Buttermilk Pancakes** (1.5)

**Home-style French Toast** (2) **(low cholesterol upon request)**

**Home-style Breakfast Burrito** (2.5)
*A soft home-style tortilla with eggs, sausage, potatoes and cheddar cheese*

**The Omelet Station**
**Choose from the following (available with low-cholesterol eggs):**
*American Cheese, Ham & American Cheese, or Veggie (peppers, onions, & mushroom medley)* ♥

**On the Side:**

**2 Pork Bacon Strips**
**1 Pork Sausage Patty**
**Home-Style Potatoes** (1.5) ♥

**Bakery:**

**English Muffin** (1.5) ♥

**Tortilla** (1.5) ♥
**Blueberry Muffin** (2)
**White, Multi-Grain or Rye Bread or Toast** (1) ♥

**Mini Bagel** (2) ♥
**Breakfast Roll** (1) ♥
**Graham Crackers** (1) ♥

*Don't forget to wash your hands before eating. Sanitizing Towellets will be provided at every meal.*

**If You Are Monitoring Your Blood Sugar Levels, Please Notify Your Nurse Once You Have Ordered Your Meal By Ringing Your Call Bell**

**Cereals:**

**Cream of Wheat** (1) ♥

**Oatmeal** (1.5) ♥
**Creamof Rice** ♥
**Brown Sugar**
**Cinnamon**

**Rice Chex** (1) ♥
**Cheerios** (1) ♥

**Honey Nut Cheerios** (1.5) ♥
**Rice Krispies** (1) ♥

**Total** (1) ♥
**Corn Flakes** (1) ♥
**Raisin Bran** (2) ♥
**Special K** (1) ♥

**Phelps Hospital**
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*The interactive menus enable Phelps to include nutritional information as well as easily change out menu offerings and promote seasonal fare.*

patient beds, housekeeping staff were devoting nearly 8,700 hours annually – the equivalent of more than four FTEs – just to keep menus sanitary.

"Maintenance and upkeep of the menus was a big hassle for me as well," says Hodges, who oversees Phelps hospitality program. "Each month, I had to do rounds of each room to be sure they had the menu book, and replace any that were missing. It was very time consuming."

An Allen Technologies customer since 2004, Phelps Memorial Hospital had seen impressive gains in patient satisfaction and engagement through other initiatives using their Allen system.  Today, their Allen system encompasses a wide range of interactive capabilities in both English and Spanish, including patient health education videos; television, movies and games; relaxation and ambient noise reduction videos; feedback tools; and more.

In just the past five years alone, the percentage of Phelps patients who give the hospital the highest possible satisfaction rating has improved nine percentage points. The hospital's top-level satisfaction

score of 76 in the most recent 2015 reporting period is significantly better than its state and national peers, which averaged 63 and 71 percent, respectively. In addition, in the same period, the percentage of patients who would recommend the hospital has seen a dramatic six-point jump, placing Phelps 14 percentage points ahead of its state benchmark average in 2015.

So it was only natural, Hodges said, that she turned to Allen's team for menu solutions. "From our work with Allen on our Excellence in a Flash program, I knew that the Allen system could solve this," says Hodges. She presented the concept to the hospital's Patient Care Coordinators meeting, encompassing all nursing staff and managers, announced it in the internal newsletter and advertised it using a one-month screen saver.  Launched initially in 15 rooms, with hospital-wide implementation to follow, she says, "The response was tremendous. People love it."

Now, when Phelps patients are ready to order dinner or an afternoon snack, they need look no further than the touchscreen monitor next to their bed. In addition to the menus themselves, Hodges worked

with Allen to add nutritional information such as calorie, sodium and carbohydrate counts. For patients on restricted diets, the nutritional information improves patient literacy around healthy eating choices. Because seasonal specials and holiday menus now can be changed out in minutes using an intuitive administrative dashboard, the food services team has been able to offer patients more variety and creativity not possible with the printed menu books. Menus soon will be offered in Spanish.

To ensure patients make the most of the online menu screens, the hospitality representatives or nursing staff orient new patients to the system. "The patient feedback has been great," reports Hodges, who already is looking into other patient services that also could benefit from using the Allen interactive system.

According to Phelps' most recent Press Ganey surveys, patient ratings of food quality, temperature and courtesy have all seen gains, she adds.

*Becker's Healthcare Review* noted in an April 2015 article, "More and more hospitals are adopting
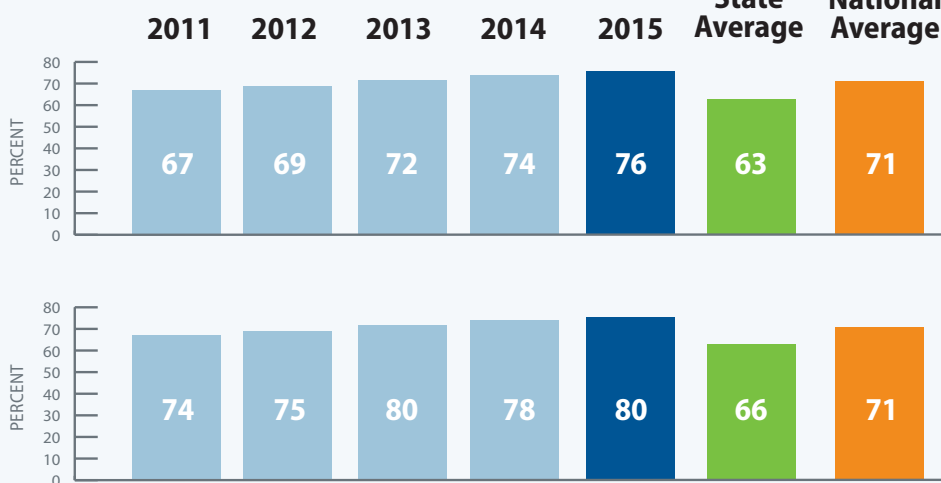
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## HCAHPS REPORT – Phelps Memorial Hospital Center, NY

### HCAHPS Answer Description

### Answer Percentage by Reporting Year

| HCAHPS Answer Description | 2011 | 2012 | 2013 | 2014 | 2015 | 2014 State Average | 2014 National Average |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Patients who gave a rating of "9" or "10" (high) | 67 | 69 | 72 | 74 | 76 | 63 | 71 |
| "YES", patients would definitely recommend the hospital | 74 | 75 | 80 | 78 | 80 | 66 | 71 |

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*"Now patients have easy access to dining menus and nutrition information, and our staff can work more efficiently."*

hotel-style room service that allows patients to order their meals anytime from an expanded menu. Patients order what they want, when they want it, reducing waste and saving hospitals thousands of dollars a year. At the same time, better quality increases revenue reimbursements by improving the hospital's image and satisfaction survey ratings. These trends are leveraging the significant value food service can add to patient satisfaction and the bottom line."

Phelps Hospital President and Chief Executive Officer Daniel Blum agrees. "Improving patient satisfaction is always a top priority for Phelps,

and this latest enhancement using our interactive system is an excellent example of the power of creatively applying leading-edge technology to solve real business challenges."

"Not only do our patients now have easier access to dining menus as well as nutrition education at their fingertips, the online menus also help our staff work more efficiently," he said. "Implementing the online patient dining program with Allen is an important step in our journey to excellence in patient satisfaction, safety and performance."