Silver Spoons Volunteer Feeding Program

Background and Purpose
Poor appetite and difficulties with feeding are problems shared by many elderly hospital patients. Hygienically packaged foods are difficult to open and busy nursing staff may not have time to assist patients. The purpose of the program is to provide support to the nursing staff and patients during meal times so that patients may meet their optimal nutritional goal.

Literature Review
Poor nutrition in the hospitalized may increase length of stay and the risk of further morbidity. It takes approximately 40 minutes to feed a patient. Those patients consuming >3/4 of meals went up from 55% to 76% when they were fed by volunteers. Volunteers, when compared to the nurses, socialized more with patients, encouraged them to eat more, and often spent more time feeding them.

Program Objectives
- Improve Clinical Outcomes: Provide assistance to patients to optimize nutritional intake.
- Patient Satisfaction: Engage and motivate patients to increase nutritional intake at daily meals.
- Staff Satisfaction: Provide volunteer resources to nursing staff for patient meal time assistance, thereby allowing staff to tend to other responsibilities.
- Volunteer Satisfaction: Provide NCH volunteers with a unique opportunity to impact patients’ well being through their gift of time and companionship at the bedside.

Implementation
- Identified the Medical Pulmonary Unit for a pilot based on the predominantly geriatric population, which is nutritionally vulnerable.
- Obtained approval from unit director, legal department, and volunteer services. Approval included providing care in isolation rooms.
- Determined availability of existing volunteers and created process for recruiting additional volunteers.
- Created educational materials and validation tools for volunteers and staff.
- Began training/validating volunteers using a “Train the Trainer” approach, whereby experienced volunteers train and validate others.
- Created process for staff to communicate to volunteers those patients needing assistance.
- Created a form for volunteers to record the percentage of food and amount of liquid consumed during the meal.

Evaluation and Future Direction
Volunteers have been trained and are currently providing meal assistance for approximately 1/3 of daily meals. Staff, volunteer, patient and family feedback has been incredibly positive. Success of this program has led to requests for implementing program across additional hospital units.

References