

CASE STUDY: NORTHEAST GEORGIA MEDICAL CENTER



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Northeast Georgia Medical Center (NGMC) Gainesville is a 557 bed general medical and surgical hospital in Gainesville, Georgia. It is the flagship hospital of Northeast Georgia Health System, a not-for-profit health system, which also includes Northeast Georgia Medical Center Braselton, as well as urgent care centers, rehabilitation centers, long-term care centers, sleep centers, mental health and substance abuse treatment centers, a satellite cancer treatment center, and in-home services.

According to CareChex®, Northeast Georgia Medical Center Gainesville is one of the top hospitals in Georgia, and is among twenty large community hospitals named to Truven Healthcare's list of the nation's 100 Top Hospitals. NGMC is ranked #1 statewide in several categories:

- **Georgia's #1 Heart Hospital**
- **Georgia's #1 Pulmonary Care Hospital**
- **Georgia's #1 Hospital for Women's Health**
- **Top 9% in The Nation for Cancer Care**
- **Top 10% in The Nation for Pneumonia Care and Stroke Care**

One reason NGMC has risen to the top is their Quest for Excellence initiative. Quest for Excellence is built on improving daily processes and identifying opportunities to apply innovative solutions that raise the bar on the quality of care and operational management.

As the leadership at NGMC examined areas that were not meeting the high standards of quality and innovation expected through Quest for Excellence, food and dining management became an area of focus. In recent years, diet and nutrition have grabbed the spotlight as America's health system has had to respond to an epidemic of obesity and obesity related conditions, including heart disease and diabetes. At the same time, there has been increased emphasis on the patient experience and a recognition that the dining experience plays a significant role in patient satisfaction due to the complex interplay of diet and nutrition, sensory, social, and service interactions that occur at each meal.

After a rigorous selection process, Northeast Georgia Health System selected Unidine as its new dining management partner in their quest for excellence.



EXCELLENCE IN HEALTHCARE

Unidine implemented fundamental changes to the dining and catering program at NGMC. In the kitchen, processed, pre-packaged meals and convenience items were replaced with whole, fresh ingredients. Authentic meals are now made fresh from scratch each day for the patients as well as for staff and visitors to the hospital's main South Tower café and Bright Spot bistro. A live carving station was added to the café where freshly roasted beef, pork, or poultry are served to order. Daily specials, seasonal menus, bi-weekly farmers markets and locally sourced fresh produce, featured wellness selections, and an abundant salad and wellness bar have all contributed to outstanding participation, revenue growth and employee satisfaction with the dining program.

Unidine's Guest Services Representatives take ownership of each patient's dining experience to provide more personalized service in addition to delicious food. A special menu for heart program patients was designed and implemented to support the hospital's reputation as the top heart hospital in Georgia.

Even in the physician's lounge, where everything served had been pre-cooked and processed, physicians now enjoy meals prepared from scratch. And the team offers public cooking programs and demonstrations to educate the community on how to cook and eat healthier.

At the end of the first year, the results were impressive. Retail sales at NGMC increased by more than 53% over the previous year. The upgraded salad and wellness bar has been a big hit, serving over 72,000 pounds of salad annually. And although NGMC Gainesville does not have a question on their patient satisfaction tool that pertains to food service, it is a point of pride that the team is often challenged by both patients and nurses who protest that the food is so delicious that it couldn't really be fresh and healthful. (It is!)

But the most telling story of Unidine's success during the first year of operation may be the two dining services team members who were recognized by Northeast Georgia Health System as Employee of the Month for the entire system.

"A dining program is woven deep into the fabric of a hospital operation, making a change after 59 years made more than a few people uncomfortable. But after the first year, we are very pleased with the results. Unidine is not resting on its successes. We are collaborating on big plans to continue the Quest for Excellence" said Sonja McLendon, Chief Excellence Officer at NGMC.



SUCCESSFUL & SEAMLESS TRANSITIONS



Two of the bigger challenges we typically face when we take over the dining program in a hospital have to do with the existing staff and kitchen. The first challenge is the transition of the existing staff. In most cases, the staff has been trained to heat pre-packaged or frozen items. So, training is required for everything from basic knife skills to basic food preparation concepts. Usually, any apprehension is quickly replaced with renewed confidence, energy and pride as the team members acquire new skills and see more opportunities for growth and advancement in a company that is changing the paradigm of food and dining management in healthcare. It's not unusual for us to discover individuals with a passion for cooking who had suppressed their skills and training and then become leaders when given the opportunity.

The other challenge is re-configuring a kitchen for fresh food production. Sometimes, it's as simple as moving a few things around. Sometimes it's a little more involved. For example, formerly packed freezers sit virtually empty and take up space while walk-in refrigerators don't have enough room.

Unidine's experts work with clients before, during and after the transition to communicate opportunities to improve service and efficiency, develop a plan and timeline for capital improvements, and manage the process to position the hospital for success.

But all of this is invisible to the patients and the customers of the hospital whose experience with the transition is delicious food, healthier options, and exceptional service.

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It's often quoted that food is medicine. Hospitals have to be practitioners, treating not only patients, but hospital employees and the greater community with good nutrition and education that promotes healthy lifestyles. We needed a dining management partner that embraced the new paradigm and would approach these new challenges as a strategic partner, and not just as a vendor.

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Sonja McLendon,

Chief of Operational Excellence
Northeast Georgia Medical Center

WHY UNIDINE?

Unidine operates in over 400 facilities and is the leading provider of food and dining management services for discerning clients throughout the United States. Since its founding in 2001 by President and CEO Richard B. Schenkel, Unidine's success derives from consistent execution in four key areas – and exclusive focus on food and dining management services, a commitment to seasonal, fresh-from-scratch cooking, exceptional customer service and a corporate culture enlivened by each team member's passion for culinary and service excellence. Unidine's network of dietitians and culinarians leverage the latest research to support cultural enrichment and wellness strategies for hospitals and behavioral health facilities, and also exceptional service for senior living communities and corporations. For more information visit: <https://www.unidine.com/>

CONTACT US:

If you would like to learn more, contact us at **(877-UNI-DINE)**, email **(unidine.solutions@unidine.com)** or visit **([unidine.com](https://www.unidine.com))**. Whether you are actively considering a change or you are simply interested in keeping up with our offerings in the marketplace, we welcome the opportunity to discuss your current situation and share additional context that will help you build a vision of how your hospital or healthcare system can deliver an exceptional dining experience for patients, staff, visitors and guests.

