

Greenville Health System

A leader in healthcare takes an all-encompassing approach to employee health

Timeline

2012 Medically based weight-loss program [LoseWell](#) began.

2013 The American Heart Association named GHS a [Fit-Friendly company](#), applauding its efforts to champion employee health.

2013 A senior administrator/physician drafted a letter introducing the idea of reducing SSBs within GHS. He pointed out the inconsistency of pushing to be a full-care health system and combatting childhood obesity, while still offering SSBs.

2014 A senior administrator/physician drafted a letter introducing a diverse task force of physicians, health educators, registered dietitians, community wellness screeners, conditioning specialists and marketing/PR team members. Their conversations led to the [ChooseWell](#) program, an initiative designed to “promote and support a culture of wellness” throughout the organization.

Toward the end of the year, a committee of executive managers from all seven campuses approved the removal of SSBs without much push-back. The decision to remove SSBs was finalized in January. Just three months later, any beverage with added sugar (including chocolate milk) had vanished from all vending machines, catering menus and cafeterias.

2015 100% fruit juices were still allowed, and employees/visitors were still permitted to bring in their own SSBs from home. Pre-existing contracts with franchises located within Greenville Memorial Hospital allowed some of these businesses to continue offering SSBs.

GHS changed the default patient beverage from sweet tea to water, but otherwise continued to keep SSBs on its patient menu for two main reasons: Patient needs (e.g., someone on a diabetic clear liquid diet) and patient satisfaction.

The CEO discussed the ChooseWell program and SSB-removal during the monthly town hall meeting, and further explanation was provided in a staff-wide email. Moving forward, these topics were also covered in employee orientations.

2016 Dietitian-approved ChooseWell food options, denoted by a green thumbs-up logo or placed in a specific ChooseWell section, were added to all GHS cafeterias. Deep fryers were removed from most cafeterias and replaced with combi ovens that mimic the taste and texture of fried food but with less fat and calories.

TODAY The task force continues to push health initiatives, most recently taking on employee fitness levels by, among other things, placing posters near the elevators encouraging people to take the stairs.

HOSPITAL STATS

SSB-free since 2015

CAMPUSES 7, (including 8 hospitals), as well as 155 affiliated practice sites

FOOD SERVICE 5 cafeterias, 2 cafés, 4 franchises including Subway, Starbucks, Au Bon Pain and Chik Fil A

EMPLOYEES 15,000+ total, including 5,400+ physicians/RNs/residents

BEDS 1,662

WEBSITE ghs.org

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*We’re giving them the choice [to be healthier].
Hopefully we’re making the choice easier at work.*

Sam Reid, Manager of Business Health and Wellness Services

Challenges

GHS encountered hurdles like non-compliance, decreased revenue and employee frustration, including:

- **Non-compliant franchises:** GHS has to work within existing long term franchise contracts, so when chains refused to remove lemonade, sweet tea and sugar-sweetened syrups from their menu, little could be done. The task force plans to revisit these contracts closer to their expiration date in 2028, but for now, it's created a ChooseWell menu to help people order more healthfully at each of these franchises.
- **Concerns about decreased revenue:** GHS initially faced a decrease in cafeteria sales with employees and visitors opting to order from in-house franchises where they could also get a SSB. However, after the launch of the ChooseWell program, people began returning to the cafeteria after about 9 months. An incentive program made good-for-you options less expensive, and for a time, a promotion allowed people to buy nine ChooseWell meals and get the tenth free.
- **Concerns about artificial sweeteners:** GHS continues to offer artificially sweetened beverages and occasionally gets push-back from people arguing that artificial sweeteners are just as bad, if not worse, than "real" sugar. GHS takes the stance that there currently isn't enough evidence to warrant removing these drinks and promises to continue to make policy adjustments as more research comes out. The Business Health Office also prints small cards with ChooseWell website information, which food service staff can hand out if a visitor has a question about this decision.

Lessons Learned

Greenville learned two primary lessons from the experience of going SSB free:

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Broaden the scope

Pairing the SSB-free roll-out with a broader food initiative may help to soften the blow. Highlight exciting new food and beverage options (GHS introduced cold-pressed juices, sparkling waters and sushi) as positive and healthy changes.

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[Frame it] so it's not just, 'We're taking away these beverages from you,' but instead, 'We're giving you all these other things to eat that are healthy for you.'

Michelle Mena Villal, Director of Food and Nutrition

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Celebrate diversity

Task forces should include a range of employees, and possibly even members of the community in order to get opinions from people “from all walks of life who can look at this from different perspectives,” said Sam Reid, manager of business health and wellness services. The GHS task force includes a vascular surgeon, multiple dietitians, a medical director, the business health medical director, a hospital CEO, the supervisor of group fitness and aquatics, the manager of business health and wellness services, the business health program and compliance manager, a director of food and nutrition and someone from the public relations and marketing department.