Community Spotlight: Extendicare Oshawa

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If the developments of the coronavirus pandemic have proven anything – it's that times can be unpredictable.

And when they're unpredictable – having a proactive emergency response plan means absolutely everything to the safety and wellbeing of your senior living community.

Recently, we had a conversation with Jessica McIvor, Dietary Manager at Extendicare Oshawa – and an amazing example of a leader in proactive emergency response – to learn a little more about her contingency planning in challenging times.

Here's how Jessica and her dietary team used food service management software as a part of their emergency response planning – and why your community should be prepared too.

Getting ahead of the curve

In unforeseen emergency situations – whether it be a pandemic or a natural disaster – senior living communities simply can't afford to solely rely on a reactive response. Having that contingency plan in your back pocket is key to safeguarding your community in any situation.

Jessica, as the fearless leader of her dietary team, knew the importance of planning – and acting – ahead. That's why, as soon as she saw that her MealSuite food service system was offering a complimentary Advanced Ordering enhancement to help them shift to safer operations, she knew it was the perfect opportunity to take action before any potential cases could affect her community.

"We decided as a home that we were going to cohort the residents to the units even without having an outbreak just to try and isolate the residents in the case that we would get a positive case in the home... I initiated (the Advanced Ordering system) prior to a potential outbreak just because I wanted to be prepared", explained Jessica.

Having the right food service software can play a huge role in boosting response plans before an outbreak is a reality for your community, as well as providing another layer of protection in the case that it does become a reality.

Physical distancing made easier

When you've got an entire community to feed, physical distancing is easier said than done – especially if you're accustomed to running a tableside service.

But with food service management software, digital ordering options make it easy to shift to in-room dining, with the ability for residents to place their own orders, or for your staff to take orders via tablet ahead of time, at a safer distance.

Prior to the pandemic developments, Extendicare Oshawa was operating primarily table service, with a few permanent in-room diners. But with the physical distancing recommendations that came with the pandemic, Jessica knew they had to flip their typical operations upside down.

"Currently, we can only have about twelve residents in the dining room at a time because of the need to stay 6 feet apart. I would say right now, about 75% of our residents are on tray service."

In the face of major change, her team found relief in knowing that they could use their food service technology to take orders safely via tablet:

"Because you're able to just input the information on the iPad, you can still talk to the resident at a safe distance, input the information, and it goes directly to dietary so we're able to give them the meals that they want... It's something that some of the other homes are trying to implement as well because they've realized that it stops the transmission of contact", explained Jessica.

Relieve your team's minds (and schedules)

Having food service technology as a readily available part of your emergency response helps to give your staff peace of mind, and ultimately, more time to focus on what matters.

Before implementing the Advanced Ordering enhancement, Jessica talked to her team, explaining that Advanced Ordering was a resource they could use to feel more comfortable and confident at work amidst this state of emergency.

> *"I said: do you think this is something we could do as a department to help keep the residents safe? And I think just knowing that there was a program out there that we could use and that it was ready to launch when we needed it – that alone just gave my staff a relief."*

Like many senior living communities, Extendicare has been experiencing cases of limited staff, due to team members needing to stay home more often for various reasons.

With food service software to help streamline their food service, Jessica explained that even their nursing staff found relief, "so they didn't have to go and manually collect all the information from the residents."

The bottom line is this: emergencies happen, and it's important to be prepared for all the "what-ifs". If you want to take actionable steps toward safeguarding your community through food service software, we might just be the partners for you.