Intalere Consulting Brings Strong Savings and Efficiency Improvements to Foodservice Operations at Saint Mary’s Home of Erie

The Challenge:
Founded by the Sisters of St. Joseph of Northwestern Pennsylvania in 1884, Saint Mary’s Home of Erie is a continuing care retirement community that has served the Erie area for 135 years. Today, Saint Mary’s continues to commit itself to a tradition of “Loving to Care” and remains dedicated to providing a dynamic response to the ever-changing needs of seniors and their families.

As a long-time Intalere member since 1986, the original Saint Mary’s facility, and the Asbury Ridge facility, added in 2001, have worked closely with Intalere on many projects around enhancing financial and operational outcomes. The partners have also gained mutual value through their affiliation with the HVA Senior Living Alliance, a group of local not-for-profit senior care organizations collaborating on education and training, low-cost contracts for supplies, grants to help defray the costs of training and operations, and sharing of best practices for collective improvement.

Allen Bonace had been with Saint Mary’s for several years as Director of Nursing and then most recently as Vice President of Special Projects and Chief Operating Officer, focusing on high impact initiatives in terms of cost reduction and operational efficiency including pharmacy and respiratory supplies. When he became CEO of the facility in June 2019, his directive continued, with a particular focus on one of the highest areas of spend for long-term care organizations – foodservice.

The Solution:
After consulting with their Intalere representative, Joe Sanders, Saint Mary’s requested the assistance of Intalere to assess their foodservice operation. The Intalere Nutrition Consulting process focuses on the comprehensive assessment of three key pain point areas:

- Benchmarking to understand the current level of economic and operational performance metrics.
- Patient Satisfaction/Operational Assessment.
- Retail Revenue Optimization.

According to Intalere Nutrition Specialist Tim Scroger, who consulted with Saint Mary’s on their project, “Intalere’s Consulting Services are designed to ensure your business processes are lean, functional and meet the specific needs of your unique organization.” As part of that, he said, “We identify use of technology to enable your business processes to deliver maximum results and,
most importantly, to maintain sustainability, and empower your people to support and operate your business processes.”

For their part, Saint Mary’s was looking for validation of short- and long-term plans, as well as lowering cost per resident day (CPRD), enhanced operational efficiencies, and higher resident satisfaction and retail revenues. CPRD is vital in that it measures efficiency in expense management. Having a clear understanding of it is valuable in comparing performance between facilities and it can also be used to identify key areas of inefficiency and help create plans for improvement.

The Intalere nutrition team reviewed every aspect of the foodservice operation – from financials, to inventory, to onsite kitchens – to help set benchmarks and comparison points vs. 15 local facilities and also those within a 100-mile radius.

“They say that you can’t improve what you don’t measure, so from that perspective it was extremely insightful,” said Bonace. “Some results were satisfying and validating. Others were surprising and cause to look at making some hard decisions.”

THE OUTCOME

Some savings and efficiencies were almost automatic, including standardization of purchases and operations between the two facilities. Others would require some frank discussion on tactics to bring down costs, including streamlining menus, enhanced inventory management and revenue generation ideas, challenges common to many foodservice operations.

Bonace appreciated the fresh set of eyes and ideas from Intalere’s specialists, former foodservice directors who had faced the same pain points. “We now know what we can correct. It’s exciting. We have concrete goals to work toward and a true path forward,” he said.

Through the assessment and collaboration on a solutions plan, Saint Mary’s lowered the cost per resident day for their two facilities by nearly 17%. They also realized enhanced operational efficiencies and have solid plans in place to gain higher resident satisfaction and retail revenues.

“In healthcare today, reducing spend means so much more than just managing the price of supplies,” Scroger added. “The key to sourcing an item more effectively is to understand all the costs associated with its purchase and use – not just the visible pricing elements. We bring that lens to every engagement, creating standard operating practices, reapplying best practices across the network and ensuring active participation in purchasing.”