

# CASE STUDY



## BETTER MEAT: EXPANDING ANTIBIOTIC STEWARDSHIP

### The Problem

Antibiotic resistant infections cost health care an estimated \$20 billion and contribute to 23,000 deaths annually.<sup>1</sup> In 2013, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) implemented a voluntary plan to phase out antibiotics used primarily for growth promotion in meat production.<sup>2</sup> However, low doses of antibiotics can still be given to animals for control and disease prevention, still contributing to antibiotic resistance. Antibiotic resistance in patients increases their length of stay as well as complicates their care.<sup>3</sup> While some food manufacturers and the health care supply chain have been slow to adopt these practices and efficiently supply the products, Hackensack University Medical Center continued to absorb the total cost of antibiotic resistance to address such a critical issue.



Eighty percent of the antibiotics sold in the U.S. are used in meat and poultry production.<sup>4</sup> Use of antibiotics for this purpose can lead to so-called superbugs; bacteria that are resistant to antibiotics. These resistant bacteria can cause human disease that is difficult or impossible to treat. Because of this, I vigorously support efforts to move towards antibiotic-free meat and poultry. This is especially important in hospitals because immunocompromised patients are particularly vulnerable to these bacteria.



- Jeffrey R. Boscamp, M.D.

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1 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) 2013. Antibiotic Resistance Threats in the United States, 2013. Available at <http://www.cdc.gov/drugresistance/threat-report-2013/>.

2 U.S. Food & Drug Administration (FDA) 2013. Phasing Out Certain Antibiotic Use in Farm Animals. Available at: <https://www.fda.gov/ForConsumers/ConsumerUpdates/ucm378100.htm>

3 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) 2013. Untreatable: Report by CDC details today's drug-resistant health threats. Available at: <https://www.cdc.gov/media/releases/2013/p0916-untreatable.html>

4 Politifact 2013. Rep Louise Slaughter says 80% of antibiotics are fed to livestock. Available at: <http://www.politifact.com/truth-o-meter/statements/2013/oct/15/louise-slaughter/rep-louise-slaughter-says-80-antibiotics-are-fed-l>

### Hackensack Meridian Health Hackensack University Medical Center

Hackensack University Medical Center's annual food and beverage budget is \$5 million with an estimated \$1.5 million spend on meat and poultry. They serve more than 2.8 million meals annually.

In only 18 months, Hackensack University Medical Center now leads the country in achieving a 98% benchmark of meat and poultry raised without routine antibiotics. Leadership is driving change through their GPO and the broader marketplace so other hospitals can have access to and benefit from purchasing these products.

The medical center received significant media attention for their leadership and perseverance in outlets like *Modern Healthcare* as recently as November 2016 and even NPR's *The Salt* in January 2016.



Hackensack  
Meridian Health  
Hackensack University  
Medical Center

## Strategy and Implementation

Hackensack University Medical Center began the journey of purchasing meat and poultry raised without routine antibiotics in 2013. After being told by suppliers there wasn't enough supply and the cost was prohibitive, the initiative was tabled until 2015. The first step that Hackensack University Medical Center took was to form a task force in order to completely transform the food service program and align it with its Population Health Strategy. This team was initiated by Robert C. Garrett, co-CEO of Hackensack Meridian Health. The team was lead by Nancy Corcoran-Davidoff, chief experience officer and executive vice president of Hackensack Meridian Health. The group had leadership from multiple departments in the hospital including:

- Hospitality
- Population Health
- The Deirdre Imus Environmental Health Center®
- Wellness
- Strategy
- Food Services
- Supply Chain

Overall the group was tasked with driving the following changes:

- Sugar sweetened beverage reduction
- Meat reduction
- Purchasing 100 percent of meat and poultry raised without the routine use of antibiotics
- Increasing local food spend
- Educating patients, employees and community members about healthy eating

To start the process, the vice president of Supply Chain presented on the topic



to their Group Purchasing Organization (GPO) supply chain board. The following summer, Hackensack University Medical Center's senior sustainability advisor at The Deirdre Imus Environmental Health Center® presented the case for going antibiotic-free at their GPO's annual conference with the aim to raise awareness and engage more organizations in aggregating their demand to influence what products the suppliers offered. Initially, Hackensack University Medical Center tried to work with its distributor; however, they turned to the GPO to avoid off-contract sourcing. Once their GPO was on board, Hackensack University Medical Center worked with their distributor, Health Care Without Harm, a chicken supplier and local brokers to work toward a full transition to antibiotic-free chicken and turkey.

Hackensack University Medical Center was also invited to the headquarters of their food

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distributor along with their GPO in order to create a plan for full conversion of chicken and turkey to sources raised without routine antibiotics. The medical center rolled out the new products on October 26, 2015 in conjunction with Food Day. To offset the price increase, Hackensack University Medical Center raised retail prices by .25 for each chicken item sold. Consistent check-ins with the GPO and relevant suppliers were necessary to ensure there was a steady supply of the food.

To bolster support as they worked to transition the rest of the meat, the sustainability advisor worked with infectious disease physicians to pass a resolution through the Medical Executive Committee showing support from the clinical community. Since then, Hackensack University Medical Center has converted 98 percent of its meat and poultry purchases to products raised without routine antibiotics, which includes beef, deli meat and pork.

## Benefits

1. Purchasing meat and poultry raised without routine antibiotics helps to shift the market towards reducing the use of medically-important antibiotics being used in meat production versus people.
2. Positive feedback from team members and patients on the better quality of the meat.
3. In less than a year, Hackensack University Medical Center became one of the leading health systems in the nation to source 98 percent of their meat and poultry raised without routine antibiotics—garnering significant media attention.

The hospital was featured in several publications:

- [Hospitals Crave Antibiotic free meat to reduce threat of superbugs \(Modern Healthcare, October 2016\)](#)
- [More Hospitals are ditching antibiotics in the meat they serve \(NPR, The Salt, January 2016\)](#)
- [Serving antibiotic-free meat proves difficult for some hospitals \(Becker's Hospital Review, January 2016\)](#)

## Challenges and Lessons Learned

Hackensack University Medical Center has encountered numerous challenges during this journey and some still remain. The first two major challenges were availability and cost of the product. Hackensack University Medical Center was able to solve the availability issue by working closely with its GPO and distributor over several months. The medical center chose to offset the cost of chicken by increasing the price in retail settings; however, the medical center chose not to take this approach for the increased price for beef.

Other remaining challenges include quantifying the benefit of being an industry leader in this space and seeing a long-term decrease of antibiotic resistant infections.

## What's Next

Hackensack Meridian *Health* will continue to focus on meat reduction, sustainable seafood and spreading these best practices throughout its network of 13 hospitals.