

TO MEDIA

CONTACTS:

Tom Chakurda
Chief Marketing and Communications Officer
Thomas.Chakurda@Independence.Health
412-508-6816 CELL

Robin Jennings
Robin.Jennings@Independence.Health
724-516-4483 CELL

Melissa Forster
Melissa.Forster@Independence.Health
814-490-6057 CELL

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Photo caption:

Independence Health System Food & Nutrition Services clinical dietitian Janelle Craig (left), volunteer Bonnie Sethman and nurse Alicia Fabian are among those collaborating to ensure patients who are at risk of food insecurity leave the hospital will nutritious non-perishable grocery items and basic cooking supplies to be successful. The project is supported by the Westmoreland Food Bank, as well as a grant from Good Food, Healthy Hospitals administered by the Hospital and Healthsystem Association of Pennsylvania (HAP).

FOOD PANTRIES AT INDEPENDENCE HEALTH SYSTEM HOSPITALS HELP PATIENTS ADDRESS NUTRITIONAL NEEDS POST DISCHARGE

GREENSBURG, October 2024 ... When patients are admitted to any of the hospitals of Independence Health System, they are evaluated based on the reason for admission, and assessed for any circumstances that would have contributed to their hospitalization or impede their discharge once treated.

By taking a close look at a patient's diet, Independence Health System care providers may find correlations related to effective management of diabetes, heart

disease and other health conditions or learn that there are barriers to preparing and consuming a nutritious meal at home.

Independence Health System Westmoreland area clinical dietitian Janelle Craig, MPH, RD, LDN, in concert with Nursing and Volunteer Services, is helping provide patients with some kitchen staples to help make the transition from hospital to home go smoothly. The project, which involves establishing food pantries at each hospital with assistance from the Westmoreland Food Bank, was piloted at Frick Hospital in May, where Craig is based. Patients who are deemed in danger of food insecurity receive a bag of self-stable groceries delivered to their room prior to discharge. The pantry is also open at Latrobe Hospital, and Craig anticipates Westmoreland Hospital's pantry will be operational by year's end.

Craig's interest in this project is quite personal: the Mill Run, Fayette County native pursued a master's in public health because she wanted to help address the health and wellness needs that can go unmet in southwestern Pennsylvania's most rural areas. Food insecurity as defined by the United States Department of Agriculture results when people don't have enough to eat and don't know where their next meal will come from. Lack of access to nutritious food is a contributing factor to poor health and can result in frequent hospitalizations. Craig's ultimate goal is to help patients learn to make food choices that help control their health conditions, and support them in that journey.

Beyond establishing the in-hospital food pantries, Craig worked alongside the Westmoreland County Farm Bureau to bring farmers' markets to Independence's three Westmoreland area hospital campuses. Held once a month on a rotating basis during the growing season, they conclude Oct. 30 at Frick Hospital, with the final market of the year scheduled between 11 a.m. and 2 p.m. in the Employee Shuttle Lot. The farmers' markets offer access to fresh locally grown or sourced produce. Patients, visitors, employees and community residents are encouraged to take advantage of the opportunity.

Both projects are rooted in the Good Food, Healthy Hospitals (GFHH) program administered by the Hospital and Healthsystem Association of Pennsylvania (HAP) and aimed at improving the health of communities across the Commonwealth through better

nutrition. The initiative is funded by the Pennsylvania Department of Health, in partnership with the Philadelphia Department of Public Health, through the Preventive Health and Health Services Block Grant from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Independence Health System Butler Memorial and Clarion Hospital have been part of the program since 2021, and have been recognized for adopting strategies for purchasing, positioning, pricing, and promotion of healthier choices in patient meals, cafeteria and catering services, and vending. The overarching goal is to increase sustainable food and beverage choices, use more whole grains, and provide plant-forward options. Craig began incorporating these strategies in the Westmoreland area hospitals last summer building on the success of Butler Memorial and Clarion.

“As a health system, part of our responsibility is to support and educate individuals on the importance of choosing a well-balanced diet to help reduce chronic disease and promote wellness,” said Dr. Kathy Selvaggi, Chief Community Health Officer at Independence Health System. “These efforts can have a profound impact as we work together to address one of life’s most basic needs.”

About Independence Health System

Nationally recognized for quality care, Independence Health System comprise Butler Memorial, Clarion, Frick, Latrobe and Westmoreland Hospitals with a combined bed count of 925. With more than 1,000 physicians and advanced practice providers and 7,300 employees, the System is now the third largest in western Pennsylvania serving a population base of 750,000 in a footprint spanning more than 10 counties.