

Rethink Your Drink: Best Practice Implementation

The Problem

There is clear and compelling scientific evidence linking the consumption of sugar-sweetened beverages (SSBs) to obesity and other chronic disease including type-2 diabetes, heart disease and hypertension.¹ Healthcare institutions across the nation recognize the urgent need to reduce rates of obesity as well as associated healthcare costs.

The Solution

SSB reduction is strongly recommended by leading medical and governmental organizations.² In response, Rady Children's Hospital (RCH) advanced an initiative called Rethink Your Drink (RYD) that integrates education, environmental modification and systems/policy change to reduce consumption of sugar-sweetened beverages among employees, patients and visitors. In support of that effort, RCH's FY13 Operating Plan, approved by the Board of Directors in June 2012, called for a 30% decrease in SSB sales by June 2013. The RYD initiative is multi-pronged, designed to provide education about the content and health effects of added sweeteners in beverages, increase the availability and consumption of healthy drink options and make healthy beverages the standard in our organization.

Prior to program launch, a small work team and larger Advisory Committee were established; case studies and best practices reviewed; and data collection systems established for tracking beverage sales in the cafeteria, deli and other hospital-controlled sources. Baseline sales data were collected July through September of 2012. Results of an employee survey administered during this time to assess attitudes, showed that most employees would support an educational initiative to reduce consumption of SSBs, but were concerned about elimination. Most employees also agreed that healthcare workers have a responsibility to model healthy behaviors.

Intervention

The intervention, focused on education and environment/policy change strategies, launched in October 2012. A "stoplight" system was chosen to emphasize education, with drinks coded as Red (high in sugar), Yellow (low sugar and/or artificial sweeteners) and Green (no sugar). Education strategies included an FAQ, web-based information, fliers, posters, beverage sampling and a variety of displays. Environmental/policy changes included beverage color coding and repositioning in coolers; increasing Yellow and Green drinks; and eliminating SSBs from room service and catering menus. Displays and demonstrations were rotated to different areas including the cafeteria, so hospital visitors were exposed to the intervention as well. Information was shared with patients via tray covers and a flyer designed specifically for children. The flyer also was made available for affiliated physicians to use in their offices.

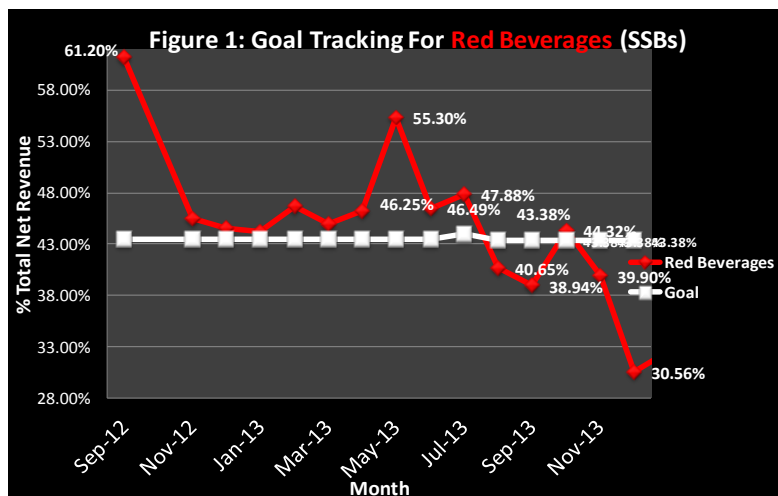


RCH - Rethink Your Drink employee flyer

1. Berkey CS, Rockett HRH, Field AE, Gillman MW, Colditz GA. Sugar-added beverages and adolescent weight change. *Obesity Research* 2004;12:778-788. 2. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Recommended Community Strategies and Measurements to Prevent Obesity in the United States. *MMWR* 2009;58 (RR-7)

Results

Seen in Figure 1, sales of SSB's (red beverages) from September 2012 to December 2013 decreased from 61.2% to 30.56% of net revenue, for an overall decrease of 50%. Sales of non-SSB's (Yellow and Green drinks) increased by 79%. Yellow beverages increased from 27.52% to 36.04% of net revenue, evidencing an increase of 31%, while Green beverages increased from 11.27% of net revenue to 33.40%, documenting a 196% increase in sales of non sugar sweetened beverages! When further analyzed to distinguish between employees and visitors, sales data showed that visitors purchased a significantly higher portion of the Red SSBs compared with employees. Based on this information, efforts were increased to ensure that visitors were exposed to educational as well as environmental changes regarding SSB consumption.



Conclusions & Future Directions

This approach has shown favorable results. Key factors for success include buy in from top leadership, establishing data collection/reporting systems up front, a strong collaboration between the Center for Healthier Communities and Food & Nutrition Services and a commitment to long-term intervention. The education and environmental/policy modifications should be constant and ubiquitous within all areas of the hospital and, ideally, extended throughout the community by way of organizational partnerships.

The RCH Rethink Your Drink initiative has generated interest from other organizations both locally and nationally via requests for consultation, presentations and webinars. Locally, the San Diego County Dental Society and Dental Hygienists Society have both adopted Rethink Your Drink as society-wide initiatives. Further, membership organizations of the Nutrition in Healthcare Leadership Team, a collaboration of local healthcare systems, have adopted a healthy beverage standard and the stoplight approach using the RCH initiative as a model. RCH is currently working on launching an initiative to increase consumption of fruits and vegetables throughout the hospital.



Left: Display showing the amount of sugar consumed annually by the average American.



Above: Poster display showing the amount of physical activity needed to burn off each SSB.

For more information, contact Cheri Fidler, CHC Director, cfidler@rchsd.org, 858-966-7748