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SoutheastHEALTH Dietitian Works to Promote Malnutrition Awareness in Missouri

SEPTEMBER 19TH 2022 BY DEE LOFLIN

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A person's nutrition status is a direct measure of health. SoutheastHEALTH Lead Clinical Dietitian Laurie Carlton, MS, RD, LD, is well aware of the importance of good nutrition and the detrimental effects of malnutrition, particularly in the hospital setting.

"As a clinical dietitian at SoutheastHEALTH with almost 11 years of working in the critical care setting and oncology unit, I have witnessed firsthand the effects malnutrition can have on patient outcomes," Carlton says.

With all of this in mind, Carlton pursued a Governor's Proclamation declaring the week of September 19 through 23 Malnutrition Awareness Week in Missouri. She notes that Malnutrition Awareness Week was launched in 2012 by the American Society for Parenteral and Enteral Nutrition, a community of dietitians, pharmacists, nurses, physicians and others who are committed to the improvement of patient care.

"Not all states recognize this week, and I wanted Governor Mike Parson's help in bringing more awareness to this issue in Missouri," she says. "I hope this will influence policy discussions, increase public awareness, allow for stronger and earlier nutrition interventions and encourage people to discuss their nutrition status with healthcare professionals."

At Southeast Hospital, Carlton explains that patients are screened for malnutrition within 24 hours of hospitalization using thorough nutrition assessments and nutrition-focused physical exams. Through early detection, nutrition interventions, monitoring and transition of care plans for patients identified as malnourished, patient outcomes are improved, length of hospital stays decreases, 30-day readmission rates decrease, the risk of pressure injuries is reduced and there is a reduction in post-op complications.

Adults age 65 and over have the highest rate of malnutrition and are the most likely to be hospitalized, Carlton adds. At Southeast Hospital, a total of 496 patients were diagnosed with malnutrition from January 2021 through August 2022. She stresses the importance of screening and early diagnosis, adding that malnutrition affects 25 to 54 percent of hospitalized adults in the U.S., but is underdiagnosed and only recorded for about 8 percent of patients.

Southeast also screens patients to determine food insecurity issues. Those who are identified receive a box of food from the hospital-based Heroes of Hope food pantry to take home with them upon discharge. Through a grant and partnership with the SEMO Food Bank, two weeks of food is provided and patients are connected with other food assistance services within their community. Since the pantry became operational in

February, over 100 patients have been served.

About SoutheastHEALTH

At SoutheastHEALTH, the region's premier healthcare system in southeast Missouri, our patients receive excellent care of the highest clinical quality, close to home. Within our network are more than 51 care locations in 11 communities, including hospitals, primary and specialty care clinics representing over 30 clinical specialties and extending care for patients in a four-state area. Learn more at SEhealth.org.

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