



## **Rush Team of the Year Tackles Patient Food Insecurity**

*We continue our series of profiles of employees recently honored with awards at our annual Founders Day celebration with this look at this year's recipient of the Bradley G. Hinrichs Team of the Year, Food Is Medicine.*

Healing at home goes beyond medicine and medical supplies. As the members of the 2019 Team of the Year know, food is medicine.

Food Is Medicine is the second phase of the [Rush Surplus Project](#), a program that's part of Rush University Medical Center's [Anchor Mission Strategy](#) to erase the 16-year life expectancy gap between the residents of the West Side and residents of the Loop. The Food Is Medicine team was commended for their success in providing patients with nonperishable food items to kick start their road to recovery at home.

This team was formed in early 2018, after the group was tasked with correlating with the Anchor Mission to address the needs of individuals on Chicago's West Side. As the

Medical Center focused on these needs, food insecurity was identified as a priority, since about 30 percent of patients admitted at the Medical Center have inconsistent access to adequate food because of limited financial and other resources.

In order to address this problem, the members of what is now the Food is Medicine team assembled to develop a plan. The group assessed that Rush had two programs already in place, the Surplus Project, which benefitted the community, and Top Box, which benefitted the employees, but not a program to benefit the patients.

"As a group, we decided to start Food is Medicine," says Jennifer Grenier, director of acute patient rehabilitation and founder of the Surplus Project. "Food is Medicine is a hospital-based food pantry that provides food to patients who screen positive for food insecurity upon admission to the hospital."

### **Patients in Need Receive Two Days of Food to Take Home**

As part of our commitment to health equity, Rush has been implementing patient screenings for social determinants of health – economic and social conditions that affect their well-being. If a patient screens positive for any of the items in the screening, there are solutions in place. Food Is Medicine was developed as a potential solution for patients who screen positive for food insecurity.

The program began in late January with a pilot on four units (7 North, 7 South and 13 West Tower and 6 Kellogg Building). Patients who screen positive for food insecurity receive a tote bag with two days' worth of non-perishable food from the Greater Chicago Food Depository, which is stored in our central kitchen. The bags are packed on Monday, Wednesday and Friday with the food and a menu to guide patients on how to make the most of what they are getting and recipes in which they can follow.

Once a patient has screened positive, our Volunteer Services Department receives an automatically generated list through EPIC that identifies the patient. With this list, the Volunteer Services Department is able to deliver the bags of food to the patients within 24 to 48 hours of their admission. In the first three months of the program, Food is Medicine distributed 170 pounds of food to patients.

### **Program Will Expand to Other Areas Soon**

Additionally, a positive screen triggers nurses to enroll these patients in [NOWPOW](#), a database that allows different social services to be filtered based on location. When

patients screen positive for a social determinant of health need, the NOWPOW database assembles a list of resources for them based on their home address, which they can use when they're discharge from the hospital. These resources print on the discharge instructions provided to the patients.

"Through the implementation of this project, we have seen a large number of patients identified as having social determinant of health needs, specifically related to food insecurity," Grenier says.

Now that the pilot has demonstrated Food is Medicine's success in identifying these patients, the Medical Center plans to begin expanding it in August, with the goal of having all inpatient units in the program by the end of the year.

The "Food Is Medicine" Team was one of three nominees for the Team of the Year Award, which also included the Endoscopy Core Charge Nurses and Visitor Management System Team. You can learn more about them by [watching this video](#), and you can [read their nominations here](#).

We previously shared profiles of other Founders Day winners. You can read their stories at the following links.

[Joseph "Joey" Bulik, Gail L. Warden Clinical Employee of the Year](#)

[Karen Ohara, Non-clinical Employee of the Year](#)

Look for more profiles of Founders Day honorees soon on Inside Rush and in *Rush News*.