

Community Gardens Cultivate Spiritual and Physical Health

The first instruction God gave Adam and Eve was to cultivate and tend the Garden of Eden. Now several Adventist Health hospitals are following suit, by nurturing fresh food gardens that provide both physical and spiritual enrichment.

While each garden's model is different, their goals are the same; to provide sustainable fresh produce and a place for exercise and restoration at a time when rates of obesity and chronic disease are skyrocketing.

"Our goal was to create a community resource," said Matthew Beehler, director of business development for Adventist Health's Central Valley Network, which includes hospitals in the California communities of Hanford, Selma and Reedley, as well as nearly 40 community clinics. The Greenfield Community Garden, located on unused hospital land in Hanford, opened in March 2012. Community residents — some from a nearby low-income apartment complex — grow their own vegetables for a modest fee that offsets utility costs.

"I feel very blessed," said gardener Jim Hanson. "You get some exercise, fresh air, sunshine; you meet people and form friendships."

White Memorial Medical Center and Simi Valley Hospital in Southern California also support local community gardens by providing volunteers and other resources. Across the ocean in Hawaii, where available land is scarce, Castle Medical Center on the island of Oahu has taken a different and innovative approach: rooftop farming.

"When I visit farms, it uplifts my spirit," said hospital nutritional services director Ruby Hayasaka. She also found that produce traveling long distances, such as from the mainland to the islands, is more prone to food-borne illness. "I thought wow, wouldn't it be neat to bring a farm to our patients, doctors and nurses?"

The hospital did, with a pioneering system from local company FarmRoof. Fat worm-like tubes of organic fibers, filled with soil and compost, were laid out in rows atop the hospital roof. Liners underneath

provide drainage and insulation. Holes are made in the tubes to plant the seeds, and a pipe infuses each tube with water.

"We grow 'super greens' with the very highest in vitamins and minerals, as well as tomatoes, herbs and other vegetables," Hayasaka said. Patients, employees and visitors enjoy the fresh produce within hours of harvest. The excess is sold at a daily farmer's market in the cafeteria.

Ananda Johnson and her husband, Keith, also grow food for patients, staff and visitors at a five-acre garden at Howard Memorial Hospital in Willits, Calif. In development for several years, the garden yielded its first crops in 2012. "My mission is for the garden to be a model of sustainable gardening," Johnson said.

Volunteers help cultivate seasonal vegetables and more than 50 fruit and nut trees. A "healing knoll" and gazebo provide a place of rest, rejuvenation and reflection. Extra produce is donated to the local senior center and food bank. "I thought it would be an incredible thing to grow the food for the hospital," Johnson said. "It can't get any fresher than this!"

Beth Martin



Greenfield Community Garden is located on property owned by Adventist Medical Center – Hanford.



Castle Medical Center physicians discuss how the rooftop farm can influence lifestyle change for patients and the Hawaiian community.