Baptist Memorial Hospital-DeSoto already had a healthy vending policy that was adopted years ago. In the fall of 2016, it sought to update and broaden that plan beyond making smarter choices at vending machines and the cafeteria. It reached out to the American Heart Association (AHA)’s Accelerating National Community Health Outcomes through Reinforcing (ANCHOR) Partnerships Program, which helped hospital employees and staff find additional ways to expand their healthy eating habits at work. Thus, Baptist Memorial formally adopted AHA’s Healthy Workplace Food and Beverage Toolkit. The guidance and suggestions from the toolkit helped the hospital incorporate healthy food and drink choices into work meetings, conferences and other events. The hospital also has been sharing tips with its community business partners. Developing healthier eating habits in the day can lead to a healthier lifestyle overall, and reduce the chance of diet-related health problems such as obesity, heart disease and diabetes, all common illnesses among those living in DeSoto County.

The Challenge
The adult obesity rate in Mississippi ranks high in the nation. Within the state, the highest obesity rates for both adults and children are found in the Mississippi Delta, home to DeSoto County. Poor nutrition is a top contributing factor for obesity, as well as diabetes, stroke and heart disease. These and other related chronic illnesses can take a toll on a community’s economy by contributing to higher medical costs. It also can lead to reduced workforce productivity by increasing absenteeism. Making health-conscious dietary changes in the workplace, where many adults spend much of their day, can be crucial to helping people lead healthier lives.

“Through these efforts, citizens of the community have an increased awareness when making a decision to choose wholesome, nutritious food over less healthy options.”
— Gia Matheny, city of Hernando’s community development director and member of the DeSoto County Community Health Council

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The Solution
Baptist Memorial Hospital-DeSoto formally adopted the AHA’s Healthy Workplace Food and Beverage Toolkit to further improve its food environment and promote a culture of health. AHA’s ANCHOR team, as part of its ongoing task force work with the DeSoto County Community Health Council, helped the hospital find easy ways to incorporate toolkit suggestions into staff meetings, conferences, special events and other work-related activities. The AHA also provided the hospital with resources and helped lead toolkit training sessions to prominent community partners interested in learning more.

Sustaining Success
Baptist Memorial’s adoption of AHA’s Healthy Workplace Food and Beverage Toolkit has resulted in the hospital hosting toolkit training sessions for community and business partners, who can then go back to their workplaces and share their newfound information with colleagues and management. This can help build widespread support for creating a culture of health at worksites throughout DeSoto County.

Policy, System and Environmental Change
Baptist Memorial Hospital-DeSoto has adopted the AHA’s Healthy Food and Beverages Toolkit, implementing a systems change within its organization. The hospital also continues to work with the AHA to fully develop and update its internal policies to reflect the systemic changes being made.

Results
By large volume, the DeSoto County community supports the implementation of nutrition standards to increase the availability of healthy food options across the area. According to a survey commissioned by the AHA’s ANCHOR program, 95% of voters agree that obesity is a problem for area residents, and a majority (91%) of voters agree that unhealthy eating habits are a problem among areas residents. And 89 percent of likely voters in DeSoto County believe that it is important that there are healthy food options available in vending machines, cafeterias, or meals served in local workplaces.

In the fall of 2016, Baptist Memorial formally embraced AHA’s Healthy Food and Beverage Guidelines Toolkit, adding its principals and guidelines to the healthy vending policy it had adopted years earlier. The hospital arranged for the AHA to support its efforts by providing resources and toolkit training sessions for interested partners. The first training session to take place in February 2017 and was a lunch-and-learn presentation about nutrition, diet and healthy workplace choices. The AHA conducted the presentation with Baptist Memorial’s staff dietician to members of Leadership DeSoto, a program by the DeSoto County Economic Council that prepares and provides leadership opportunities for emerging policymakers and trendsetters.

Get Involved
Learn about the steps you can take to create a culture of health at your worksite – or how to encourage your management to adopt such an environment. More information about workplace wellness can be found here: heart.org/workplacewellness, while specific information about incorporating smarter dietary choices can be found within AHA’s Healthy Workplace Food and Beverage Toolkit.