

APPROACHING FOOD WITH CARE



After 18 years as a chef in the hospitality sector, MICHELLE MICARELLI decided to carry her many culinary skills over to health care. Michelle, who has led the Armenian Nursing & Rehabilitation Center's food service team as its director since December, wants the meals served to bring residents comfort, just like in their favorite restaurant, or with home cooking. "Meals should make them happy," she says.



On a recent afternoon, residents gathered to bake traditional Armenian simit cookies. In between a savory biscuit and a sugar cookie, simit cookies are a buttery cracker-like snack, usually covered with sesame and nigella seeds. The dough is often flavored with mahleb, a spice made from ground cherry seeds. Making these cookies has been a monthly tradition at the Armenian Nursing & Rehabilitation Center for more than 15 years. Residents and staff enjoy rolling the dough into circles and other shapes. They are the perfect treat to pair with a cup of tea or Armenian coffee.

Michelle relishes feedback meeting with all long-term care residents and rehabilitation patients to understand their culinary preferences. With the help of a dietitian, she has diversified the menu and makes sure to balance comfort foods with healthy options and to source local, fresh and natural options. The food service team takes advantage of the close relationship between Armenian cuisine and the Mediterranean diet that's well-known for its healthy ingredients. Meals feature olive oil, grains, citrus and fish that are enjoyed by many residents. She has witnessed the benefits of this heart-healthy diet, as residents become more focus and energized.

Cooking food for scores of residents isn't the only thing Michelle has on her plate. She is actively planning fun, food-related activities to engage the residents and get them even more excited about healthy eating – though she isn't opposed to the idea of having the occasional ice cream truck stop by for a treat. A top priority is to start composting in order to fertilize a vegetable garden for residents, which will provide them with a chance to grow and nurture their own fresh ingredients.

Given the diversity of our residents and patients, Michelle reminds us that "food translates." We

couldn't agree more, and we're excited to have her

on our team to keep food a language of love.