Influential Women Features Samantha Lunsford: Elevates Hospital Dining Through True Culinary Excellence And Leadership



SIMI VALLEY, CA, UNITED STATES, September 23, 2026 / EINPresswire.com/ -- A Culinary Professional Turned Healthcare Food Service Leader, Samantha Lunsford, CDM, CFPP, is Transforming the Patient Dining Experience Through Teamwork, Innovation, and a Deep Commitment to Service

Simi Valley, California – For Samantha Lunsford, CDM, CFPP, food service is about much more than preparing meals. As Director of Food and Nutrition Services at Adventist Health Simi Valley, she oversees a department that plays an important role in the daily experience of patients, employees, and visitors. From medically appropriate patient meals and staff dining to large-scale catering for hospital events, Samantha approaches her work with the belief that food can contribute to comfort, healing, and a stronger sense of connection.

Her career reflects an unusual but valuable combination of culinary training, operational experience, healthcare food service knowledge, and people-centered leadership. A graduate of Le Cordon Bleu College of Culinary Arts in Pasadena, where she earned an associate's degree with a focus on baking and pastry, Samantha initially built her career in the culinary world. Her early experience in bakery management and pastry roles gave her a strong understanding of food preparation, quality, organization, and the demands of a fast-paced food operation.

Her professional path eventually led her into healthcare food service, where she discovered an opportunity to apply those skills in a setting where food carries an even greater significance. Through positions with organizations such as Sodexo at Adventist Health Simi Valley, Samantha

developed her operational and leadership capabilities and took on increasing responsibility. She ultimately earned the Certified Dietary Manager and Certified Food Protection Professional (CDM, CFPP) credentials, helping prepare her for hospital leadership.

Today, Samantha oversees a complex food and nutrition operation while remaining focused on one of its most important responsibilities: ensuring that patients receive meals that meet their medical and dietary needs. She works closely with clinical teams to support nutrition care plans and address concerns such as malnutrition and specialized therapeutic diets. At the same time, she remains attentive to the human side of the patient experience, understanding that a meal can provide comfort during what may be a difficult and unfamiliar time.

That perspective has shaped her approach to leadership. Samantha believes strong results come from strong teams, and she credits hard work, perseverance, service, and problem-solving as essential elements of her success. She does not view achievement as the accomplishment of one person alone. Instead, she sees the growth and development of the people around her as one of the most meaningful measures of effective leadership.

A major influence on that philosophy has been Samantha's father. Working in the studio industry, he began his career as an intern putting film reels into containers. When an opportunity unexpectedly arose because someone called out sick, he stepped forward and demonstrated that he was ready to contribute. That moment became the beginning of a career in which he eventually worked his way up to Director of Operations at a large Hollywood sound studio.

Watching her father progress through his career gave Samantha an early understanding of what commitment and work ethic could accomplish. His example also helped shape her perception of what a director and manager should be. She wanted to develop a career with the same dedication and leadership principles, even though she chose a completely different industry.

The lessons she learned from him continue to influence the way she approaches her own responsibilities. Samantha believes that meaningful success requires putting in the work, remaining persistent when challenges arise, and being willing to step forward when opportunities appear.

That willingness to step outside her comfort zone has been another defining part of her professional journey. Samantha recalls receiving career advice to focus on being valuable rather than simply being busy. For her, that means looking beyond a list of tasks and asking how she can solve problems, support her team, improve operations, and make a meaningful difference.

That mindset became particularly important when she pursued a healthcare management position without having the traditional healthcare manager credentials she believed might be expected. Her husband encouraged her to take a leap of faith and apply, reminding her that the worst possible outcome was simply being told no. Samantha took the chance, and the company

took a chance on her.

That decision became a turning point in her career. Rather than allowing uncertainty to prevent her from pursuing an opportunity, Samantha chose to find out what was possible. Her experience reinforced a lesson she now shares with others: people should not allow fear of the unknown to stop them from pursuing their goals.

For young women entering food service and healthcare, Samantha emphasizes confidence, curiosity, kindness, and resilience. She encourages women to take on challenges, learn from every experience, and develop relationships with mentors and peers who can help them grow. In an industry that requires constant interaction with different personalities, departments, and professional backgrounds, Samantha believes the ability to work effectively with people is essential.

She also emphasizes the importance of kindness. In healthcare, where employees interact with patients and families during vulnerable moments, treating people with consideration can have a meaningful impact. Samantha believes young professionals should keep their heads held high, develop confidence in their abilities, and understand that their voices have value.

Her own leadership style reflects those principles. Samantha strives to be approachable rather than intimidating and believes employees should feel comfortable communicating with her. While she holds the responsibility of directing the department, she does not believe leadership should create unnecessary distance between a director and the people they lead.

Mutual respect is central to that philosophy. Samantha respects her employees and expects that respect to work both ways. She believes the strongest teams are developed through trust, communication, and a shared understanding that everyone contributes to the department's success.

She also leads from the front. Samantha would not ask an employee to do something she would not be willing to do herself. Her open-door policy reflects her belief that employees should feel heard, valued, and supported. For Samantha, trust is a two-way relationship, and creating a workplace where people feel appreciated gives them greater opportunity to perform at their best.

Within healthcare food service, Samantha sees significant challenges alongside important opportunities. Rising costs, inflation, and the broader expense of food and everyday necessities continue to place pressure on operations. At the same time, healthcare organizations must maintain high standards for patient care while supporting employee engagement and working within available resources.

For Samantha, however, one of the most exciting opportunities lies in changing perceptions of hospital food.

Hospital dining has historically been associated with bland or unappealing meals, but Samantha wants to challenge that expectation. Her goal is to provide food that satisfies clinical requirements while also being fresh, appealing, and enjoyable. Patients have different nutritional needs and dietary restrictions, but Samantha believes those requirements do not mean they should have to sacrifice the pleasure and comfort associated with a good meal.

That mission connects her culinary background with her healthcare responsibilities. The skills she developed in baking, pastry, and food operations continue to inform her approach, while her healthcare experience provides the clinical perspective necessary to understand why nutrition is such an important part of patient care.

Samantha's commitment to the patient experience extends beyond the plate. She created the "Art for the Heart" program, an initiative that brings artwork and uplifting messages from local children and community members to hospital patients. The program provides patients with encouraging reminders of the community beyond the hospital and adds a personal, creative element to their recovery environment.

The initiative also reflects Samantha's belief that healthcare is fundamentally about people. Food, art, kindness, communication, and compassion can all contribute to making an institutional environment feel more welcoming.

Her connection to the surrounding community is therefore an important part of her work. Through programs such as "Art for the Heart," Samantha helps create opportunities for local community members to participate in the hospital experience while giving patients something positive to focus on during their stay.

Outside of her professional responsibilities, Samantha's family remains at the center of her priorities. She wants her children to see through her example the importance of hard work, kindness, and perseverance. She also places great value on her husband and on maintaining a healthy balance between her professional responsibilities and the people she loves.

For Samantha, that balance is not simply about managing a schedule. It is about recognizing the importance of being present for the small moments that can easily be overlooked. Time with family is precious, and she has learned not to take those moments for granted.

Her professional credentials and culinary background provide the technical foundation for her work, while her leadership philosophy gives her role its deeper purpose. As a Certified Dietary Manager and Certified Food Protection Professional and a member of the Association of Nutrition and Food Service Professionals, Samantha continues to combine education, experience, and service in an environment where food and nutrition directly intersect with patient care.

From her beginnings in baking and pastry to her current leadership in hospital food and nutrition services, Samantha's career has been shaped by a willingness to learn, take opportunities, support others, and keep moving forward. Her father's example taught her the value of work ethic, her career taught her the importance of taking calculated chances, and her leadership experience has reinforced the power of teamwork.

Ultimately, Samantha measures her work not only by the meals served or operations successfully managed, but by the people affected by her leadership. Whether she is supporting a patient's nutritional needs, helping an employee develop professionally, improving the dining experience, or connecting patients with encouraging messages from the community, she remains focused on the same principle that has guided her throughout her career: meaningful success comes from serving others, putting in the work, and creating an environment where people can thrive.

Learn More about Samantha Lunsford:

Through her Influential Women profile, https://influentialwomen.com/connect/samantha-lunsford

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