Ask children and families to give their impressions about hospital visits, and chances are good that two subjects will crop up each time: “food” and “needles.” Now, thanks to the Family Advisory Board (FAB) – a group composed of parents of pediatric patients and CHaD leadership – things are changing for the better.

The call to help make things better was answered enthusiastically by DHMC’s Food and Nutrition Services, under Ron Piche, and the Phlebotomy Team, headed by Michelle Gour. Each of these departments is the recent recipient of a CHaDvocate Award. “These awards thank people who, compelled by their own interest in patient- and family-centered care, advocate to improve services for children,” says CHaD’s Toni LaMonica, MSW, co-creator of the award with Sharon Brown, Director of Community Relations.

Based on outpatient satisfaction surveys, FAB identified pediatric phlebotomy as a prime opportunity for improvement. A task force toured the phlebotomy facility and even visited other children’s hospitals, and provided recommendations on how the experience might be improved for children at CHaD. One recommendation was to change the layout of the facility, so children would have a separate entrance from the adult area. Also, Child Life Specialist Jessica La-Perle now works with phlebotomy team to help them learn strategies to ensure a more calm and comfortable experience for children. It is that collaborative, mutually supportive teamwork, LaMonica adds, that earned the Phlebotomy Team its CHaDvocate Award.

Changing focus to CHaD’s inpatient population, two patient-family advisors, Meg Seely and Gabi Black – in conjunction with nursing and Child Life Specialists – interviewed over 100 hospitalized kids, aged 6 through 18, and their parents, in FAB’s “Voices” project. The goal of “Voices” (an ongoing project) is to get first-person accounts of patient and family experiences. From the start, one of the hottest topics among kids was food. “It’s a typical children’s hospital issue,” says LaMonica. “Ron Piche and his whole group have been responsive and energetic in this project. That is why they, too, have been awarded a CHaDvocate Award. As a result of their energy, we now have a wonderful food cart that comes up to the unit twice a day. It is filled with healthy snacks, like yogurt and granola that the kids asked for. Plus, we decided that the cart is not just for the kids, but for their siblings as well. And now the kids line up for it!”

“Changing our patient-family advisors are involved, it simply pushes improvement processes to another level,” says LaMonica. “This is not about listening to complaints or to kudos, for that matter, and just stopping there. It’s about engaging people to become part of the process to improve, always improve. If you care about the child’s experience and seek to better it, you’re a CHaDvocate, and we want to celebrate you and what you have achieved on behalf of children.”

Do you know someone who deserves a CHaDvocate award? We want to hear from you! Write to Sharon Brown at Sharon.Brown@hitchcock.org and tell us all about it.