



Look Inside this Plant-Strong Hospital and Meet the Cardiologist Who's Leading the Charge (Video)

By Karen Asp
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He's the director of preventive cardiology at Montefiore Health System in Bronx, New York, and associate professor of medicine at Albert Einstein College of Medicine, but his medical students call him Dr. Kale. That's because Robert Ostfeld, MD, is taking giant leaps forward to bring [plant-based](#) nutrition into Montefiore hospitals, including screening *Forks Over Knives* at patients' bedsides. Check out our exclusive new *Trailblazer* video highlighting the plant-based program at Montefiore, and read on for our in-depth interview with Dr. Kale himself.

<https://youtu.be/1JqJyFeGLQ>

FOK: When did you start your plant-based journey?

RO: I started eating this way in 2010, primarily for health reasons. I was raised on a standard American diet, and even after going through medical school, I learned almost nothing about nutrition. I kind of knew the Mediterranean diet was OK. ...When I was first talking to patients about the Mediterranean diet, people got better but not a lot, and I was getting disillusioned. I didn't go into medicine to help people get a little better; I wanted transformational change.

FOK: What changes have you made at Montefiore to introduce people to plant-based nutrition?

RO: I started by counseling patients about plant-based eating and holding free Saturday sessions every so often where a dietitian and I would take a deep dive into plant-based eating and serve a plant-based lunch. Those sessions are now weekly and still free for patients and families. Yet when I first got started, I was being undercut after my hospital rounds because patients could still order meat dishes. So I worked with food services to create a heart-healthy vegan menu for patients. The cafeteria has since started serving those meals, which I'm told they sell out of. But after seeing that we needed a larger educational component, we teamed with Forks Over Knives. Today, that film runs continuously on TVs in every room in four or five hospitals, so roughly 2,000 beds. I'm also working to educate the medical community. Every year, I talk with second-year medical students at Albert Einstein about the benefits of plant-based nutrition, I speak around the country, and I've

developed an academic preventive cardiology conference focused on nutrition.

FOK: How have these changes been received by patients?

RO: Many are already eating this way and want a physician who aligns with their views. Others, however, look at me like I'm from Mars when I bring it up. Meanwhile, some start watching *Forks Over Knives* in their room, and before seeing a physician, they ask how they can eat like that.

FOK: What kinds of improvements have you seen in patients who've made the switch?

RO: I've had patients cry tears of joy about how good they feel, which nobody does when I prescribe cholesterol medications. As for actual results, it's things like avoiding stents, coming off multiple medications (17 for one patient), losing weight, reversing diabetes, and lowering cholesterol. Yet don't get me wrong: Not everybody improves like this. Only when patients tell me they've gone at least 50 percent plant-based do changes in health start happening.

FOK: What's the biggest obstacle patients report after leaving the hospital?

RO: Changing routines and habits, especially when you're doing something different from everybody else. That's why we encourage family members and friends to come to our Saturday sessions so they can learn about this way of eating and help support that individual who wants to make the change.

Ready to get started? Check out [Forks Meal Planner](#), FOK's easy weekly meal-planning tool to keep you on a healthy plant-based path.