



THE HEALTH CARE IMPROVEMENT FOUNDATION

Building Partnerships For Better Health Care

ABINGTON MEMORIAL HOSPITAL

The “Green Team”

About the Hospital

Abington Memorial Hospital is a 570-bed acute care teaching hospital in Montgomery County with a medical staff of more than 900 physicians and more than 5,600 employees. These professionals provide medical care and health services to residents of Bucks, Montgomery and Philadelphia counties.

A regional provider, Abington Memorial Hospital has the only Level II accredited trauma center in Montgomery County and offers highly specialized services in cardiac care, cancer care, neurosciences, orthopaedics, and maternal/child health. As a teaching hospital, Abington maintains affiliations with Drexel University College of Medicine and the Temple University School of Medicine. In addition to operating a number of satellite outpatient facilities, Abington Memorial Hospital recently acquired the former Warminster Hospital and Central Montgomery Medical Center (renamed Lansdale Hospital).

Background on the Green Team

Abington Memorial Hospital began thinking about reducing the presence of toxic materials in 2000 with the initiation of a program to eliminate mercury from the main hospital and all satellite facilities. This program was extremely successful, and the hospital is virtually mercury-free. In 2005 the hospital, determined to eliminate the use of DEHP in areas such as the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit, worked closely with Hospira to achieve that goal.

A natural outgrowth of the hospital's interest in “greening” the health care environment was the creation of a “Green Team”. This multidisciplinary group was formed in 2006 and has met on a monthly basis since that time. The team consists of members who represent a wide variety of hospital departments/functions, including:

- facilities/plant operations;
- nutrition services;
- environmental services;
- biomedical engineering;
- infection control;
- nursing;
- information technology;
- public relations and marketing;
- and a number of individuals whose personal passion makes them an asset to the team.

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Additionally, “green team” champions are being identified in many hospital departments to act as informal liaisons to the “Green Team”. These individuals will be responsible for encouraging their colleagues to do the right thing; will educate and communicate information to staff regarding hospital “green” initiatives, etc.

The “Green Team” Focus

The “Green Team” takes the leadership role on new initiatives that positively impact both the environment within the health system and contribute to the well being of the planet. The main focus of the team has been to increase the amount and type of recycling practiced by hospital personnel; to appropriately sort waste streams to minimize landfill waste; and to increase awareness of the ways in which all employees can positively impact the environment.

Some of the initiatives that were implemented under the leadership of the “Green Team” include:

- recycling of plastic, bottles and cans;
- recycling of paper;
- reduction in the volume of red bag waste (regulated medical waste) generated and processed by the hospital;
- recycling of demolition debris generated during construction projects;
- destruction of computer and other electronic equipment with no residual material destined for landfills;
- recycling of batteries and other medical equipment;
- composting of food waste and conversion of cooking oil into biodiesel fuel;
- utilization of more sustainable food products (e.g., bovine growth hormone-free milks and meats, local produce and other products);
- use of “greener chemicals” by environmental services staff;
- availability of bike racks to encourage the alternative mode of transport;
- re-programming printers and copy machines to print double-sided and eliminate unnecessary printing;
- a variety of energy saving efforts associated with both mechanical systems and electrical consumption;
- recycling of fluorescent tubes;
- “rounding” on areas of the hospital to educate staff and monitor compliance with recycling and other efforts.

Additionally, the “Green Team” has focused on creating and implementing a policy of Environmentally Preferred Purchasing (EPP). This policy would allow for the inclusion of environmental impact information in the decision making process of product acquisition. This program is in its infancy and will depend on information provided by manufacturers regarding packaging practices, production of harmful chemicals during manufacture, and the ability of the end product to be recycled and/or reprocessed.

Achievements

While many of the efforts undertaken by the hospital under the direction of the “Green Team” cannot be directly quantified (e.g., energy savings due to reduction in usage, offset by continuing growth in new programs, volumes, etc.) there are some that clearly show the success of the programs initiated by Abington Memorial Hospital. For example:

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- Red bag waste has been reduced significantly during the period from January 2009 to June 2009. The data shows that the hospital reduced its red bag waste from 26.5% of its total waste stream to 15.9% of total waste. Ongoing efforts in the Operating Room Suite, Cardiac Catheterization lab and other areas that generate large quantities of red bag waste will likely produce an additional decline in volume.
- The hospital has increased the percentage of recyclable waste during the same period from 13.9% to 23%, an increase of almost 10%.
- Recycling of debris generated during demolition and construction projects has reached as high as 84%.

Future

The hospital intends to continue its efforts to improve recycling, reduce the use of harsh chemicals and implement a more rigorous policy of Environmentally Preferred Purchasing. Future recycling efforts will focus on the inclusion of appropriate clinical supplies such as blue wrap, plastic tubing, etc.

The “Green Team” will continue to reach out to all areas of the hospital by recruiting staff to partner with the team in developing more creative strategies that encourage recycling and re-use.

Abington Memorial Hospital plans to incorporate information on “green” strategies and achievements on its newly designed web site. Employees and others will be able to monitor the hospital’s efforts and will be encouraged to make suggestions on additional areas of focus.

The hospital will continue to pursue environmentally sound policies and practices and will continue to push the envelope on sustainable initiatives.