

The Hospital
University of Chicago Medical Center

The Challenge
Creating a sustainable and green environment without compromising patient safety

The Solution
Traditional cleaning products were replaced with an ergonomic, high performance cleaning system to reduce usage of chemical-laden cleaning solutions and conserve water

The Vendor
UMF Corporation – PerfectCLEAN

WHAT WORKS

Yes, Kermit – it IS easy being green

with Stan Robinson, University of Chicago Medical Center

In the words of Kermit the Frog, one of Sesame Street's most celebrated characters, "it's not easy being green." But if you talk to Stan Robinson, the head of environmental services at the University of Chicago Hospitals, he'll tell you it's easier than you think. And it's easier than he thought it would be a year ago.

As one of the largest employers on the South Side of Chicago, the University of Chicago Medical Center has a workforce of about 9,500 employees, more than 700 attending physicians, 620 medical fellows and residents and more than 1,000 nurses on staff. The Medical Center is comprised of an adult inpatient care facility, the city's newest children's hospital, a women's hospital and an advanced outpatient care facility. It is also home to the Pritzker School of Medicine, one of the nation's premier medical schools.

In addition to caring for their patients, leaders at the U of C Medical Center recently embraced a Sustainability Program out of care for the environment – inside and outside the hospital.

As part of the initiative, the U of C Medical Center has a plastic recycling program that diverts more than 500 pounds of waste each day from landfills to recycling plants,

and ensures that 90 percent of cleaning supplies used by the hospital have Green Seal certification. Such efforts have reduced waste costs at the Medical Center from \$55,000 per month to \$35,000 per month, suggesting that reducing environmental impact can go hand-in-hand with reducing costs in a hospital setting.

While cutting waste makes a significant reduction in the Medical Center's carbon footprint and saves the organization significant dollars, Robinson knew more could be done.

"Environmental services is responsible for cleaning more than 500 patient rooms, every restroom, waiting room, hallway and practically every area in the hospital and research buildings," said Robinson, executive director of Environmental Services at the University of Chicago Medical Center. "We felt there must be a way to maintain a superior level of cleanliness and improve the overall hospital environment at the same time. Change is imminent and we embrace it."



Stan Robinson, executive director of Environmental Services at the University of Chicago Hospitals

procedures. Robinson was also aware of new trends in the industry that he wanted to explore. After analyzing the products and cleaning methods used over five years, he decided it was time for a new approach.

One of the first things Robinson focused on was switching from heavy cotton string mops and terry-loop rags to technologically-advanced microfiber wipers and flat mops. Instead of an old-school approach of submerging mops in a chemical

solution, wringing them out, mopping, changing the water and so forth, Robinson wanted a simpler way to get the job done.

After reviewing all of his options, Robinson homed in on two companies that offer microfiber products – which are known for their superior efficacy in removing surface contaminants, factoring in to a reduction in healthcare associated infections, commonly known as HAIs. The environmental services team conducted a month-long trial, testing the cleaning tools from both vendors.

The results clearly showed his staff's preference for the products offered by one of the two companies, UMF Corporation's PerfectCLEAN products. Employees reported that fewer chemicals were needed, the wipers thoroughly removed surface contaminants and the products were easy to use. The conclusion: it was definitely time to make a change.

So last year Robinson began replacing the Medical Center's rags and string mops with PerfectCLEAN. "We felt that PerfectCLEAN offered the best products and had the technical knowledge and expertise to work with us through the transition and long after," he said. "They demonstrated how we could cut the time spent cleaning, improve interaction with patients

WHAT WORKS

and reduce the amount of chemicals and resources we were using.”

He added that the string mops they used previously were bulky and caused physical strain. “The PerfectCLEAN mop heads are light, the handles adjust and are flexible and there’s no need to cart around buckets of water,” Robinson said. “A clean flat mop is used for each room and is easily removed and replaced at every room. This step alone has made a huge difference.”

And the PerfectCLEAN wipers are equally as beneficial. Medical Center staff members use fewer chemicals than before, and the wipers are laundered in-house – saving time and resources.

The PerfectCLEAN team worked with Robinson to create a customized, color-coded system to designate everything from Operating Room-specific products, to color-coded wipers and flat mops for use in bathrooms, patient rooms and other areas. Color-coding is also used to indicate which wipers are to be used wet or dry.

The company worked 24/7 with Robinson and his supervisors to train the 450 members of the Environmental Ser-

vices team. “They initially provided onsite training and helped us refine our 10-step cleaning process that efficiently meets our high standards,” said Robinson. “About 95 percent of staff prefer the new system we adopted. We have informal team leaders who provide input and are instrumental in the implementation of our new cleaning program. PerfectCLEAN welcomes the feedback and as a result, conducted additional training from one-on-one sessions to group presentations.”

Since they began working with PerfectCLEAN in 2009, results have been dramatic. Robinson estimates the Medical Center is conserving 2.5 million gallons of water annually and has reduced the usage of chemicals and cleaning solvents by 50,000 gallons. He also doubled his goal of saving \$1.1 million in supply chain costs to \$2.2 million.

So what’s next on the Medical Center’s ecological agenda? As part of the Medical Center’s Sustainability team, Robinson reports there are no plans to slow down and the U of C will stay true to its environmental mission. The Sustainability team is working to attain the prestigious LEED

Silver certification from the U.S. Green Building Council for its New Hospital Pavilion, scheduled to open in 2012. So move on over Kermit, you’re not the only one who likes to stay green! **HPN**

Read more about the U of C sustainability initiative at: <http://sustainability.uchicago.edu/medical/>



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Cleaning Up The Environment One Room at a Time