

Helping Hospitals Cut Costs by Reducing Linen Use

Key Learnings:

- *Use National benchmarking to identify top linens to focus on for the greatest impact on Laundry Budget*
- *A Linen Management Committee with shared responsibility by Linen and Nursing Staff delivers the greatest results*
- *Linen costs can be reduced by 30% annually*

By Vince Ball

Linen may not seem a likely place for hospitals to significantly reduce their costs. Using fewer gowns or wash cloths may seem trivial, but I can assure you it's not.

Working with one of the largest hospitals in Georgia, Crothall Laundry has helped the hospital reduce linen use from 15 pounds to 11 pounds per patient day. As a result, the hospital's linen costs have been cut approximately \$1,000 per day, or \$365,000 annually.

After receiving a request from the client to cut linen costs, we developed and implemented a comprehensive linen cost management program – a cornerstone of the value-added services provided to all customers. Crothall has managed laundry and linen services at this hospital since 2009, so we have a solid working relationship with the medical team and know its current costs and its linen budget.

To develop a team approach, we established a linen committee in 2013 consisting of hospital and Crothall managers and chaired by Miriam Josey, Crothall's customer service manager and a 17-year Crothall employee. The committee meets regularly to discuss issues and review data on linen use as well as the Crothall client visitation report, which provides a comprehensive review of Crothall's services.

As part of our cost management program, Crothall shares a national data base with each hospital to help develop its linen budget. The data base provides information regarding the average linen use for acute care patients, as well as for each hospital department, such as intensive care, surgical and major medical units.

Our data base shows hospitals how they compare to peers with a similar amount of patient activity and often makes it clear where there are immediate opportunities to be more efficient. By drilling down on the data, there may be 15 core pieces of linen where use can be reduced. To have the most impact on cost reduction, I'll often identify the top three items where costs can be cut.

Working with the staff at this particular Georgia hospital, Crothall Laundry has cut linen use at the hospital by approximately 2,000 pounds per day. At most hospitals, isolation gowns are the top item used too often or incorrectly, with wash cloths a close second. These items are often thrown away after only a single use instead of placing soiled linen in the appropriate containers for laundering. We can cut linen costs by 30 percent annually at many hospitals by implementing several key steps:

- Determine if linen inventory can be reduced. Hospitals typically stock too many types of gowns, so Crothall often recommends reducing the types of gowns while increasing inventory for those that remain. For example, instead of stocking 15 different gowns, reduce it to three while being able to closely monitor the remaining inventory.
- Work with the hospital's medical team to ensure that infection control policies regarding linen use are clear.
- Collaborate with hospital staff on a "bed change policy" to determine if the number of pillow cases and sheet changes are correct.
- Share data gathered from other Crothall hospitals, compare policies and procedures and provide recommendations about current use and opportunities.
- Communicate directly with nursing units. With smart phones now prevalent, Crothall is exploring the use of webinars and other ways to share information digitally with hospitals to reach individual end users to help control linen use.

Helping hospitals reduce linen costs not only helps the hospital's finances, but strengthens Crothall's working relationships with key clients. Providing them with a linen management strategy that works demonstrates that Crothall goes far beyond picking up and cleaning laundry and is bringing clear value to the hospital.

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