

JFK Medical Center

▶ PLAYING TO THEIR STRENGTHS



The John F. Kennedy Medical Center in Edison, New Jersey, is what Senior Vice President of Operations Amie Thornton described as an “extremely busy” and “sophisticated” community hospital.

As one of New Jersey’s major healthcare facilities, JFK is particularly recognized for its stroke and rehabilitation programs. JFK’s Johnson Rehabilitation Institute was ranked as one of the best hospitals in the nation for 2013-14 for rehabilitation by U.S. News & World Report. Also, JFK was the first hospital in the tri-state area to be awarded advanced certification for comprehensive stroke centers by The Joint Commission and the American Heart Association/ American Stroke Association.

Like many healthcare organizations, for years, JFK handled its environmental services needs in-house; but when its EVS manager abruptly departed in 2008, JFK was forced to look outside the organization for help.

As a stopgap measure, JFK brought in Crothall Healthcare to oversee environmental services (EVS) until they could implement a long-term plan, recalled Thornton. At the time, she did not anticipate the strong partnership that would develop and become her vision for the long-term plan.

THE START OF SOMETHING NEW

Thornton, who was new in her role at that time, recalled being reluctant to call in a third party.

“The hospital was built on the premise of local roots,” she said.

Bringing in an outside company did not coincide with established precedent.

Thornton said JFK chose Crothall mostly because they were “wowed” by level of experience conveyed by Crothall’s lead representative, Donald O’Toole.

Soon after Crothall stepped in, Thornton said she began to realize that partnering with a company like Crothall might be the way to go.

Even though JFK is a proven healthcare provider, this didn’t necessarily make them an expert in EVS.

Crothall, with its vast industry experience, was able to identify areas of opportunity. Its management team could pull proven strategies off the shelf and put them in place at JFK, Thornton noted.

Early the following year, JFK decided to partner with a dedicated EVS company long-term. They ultimately chose Crothall after narrowing the contenders down from five.

At that time, the department's HCAHPS scores for cleanliness were in the mid- to low-60s. EVS had a long way to go.

THE CHALLENGE

O'Toole, who entered JFK with almost 30 years of industry experience, knew from the outset that turning things around at JFK would not be easy.

As described by Thornton, Crothall was thrust into an "entrenched culture" with a loyal, hardworking group of employees who wanted to do the right thing, but needed the right training and tools. Adding to the challenge, JFK did not have the luxury of a "shiny, new building" or the capital to invest in new facilities, so Crothall had to find a way to make older facilities look clean and fresh.

STEP ONE

One of the first challenges to overcome was a language barrier. The vast majority of the housekeeping staff members were Portuguese, and about 70 percent of the staff had difficulty communicating, O'Toole says.

To address this, Crothall worked with the hospital's Education Department to obtain a state grant to fund an ESL (English as a Second Language) program.

It took about three years to complete the process, but the results, O'Toole says, have been dramatic.

EVS employees "were able to develop confidence through ESL to be able to clearly communicate with people." Particularly in today's healthcare climate, where personal interactions with patients are critical, this is a huge advantage.

OTHER INITIATIVES

With communication flowing more freely, a number of other steps were implemented to boost EVS performance.

▲ **Training:** Employees were totally retrained on everything from chemicals and equipment to scripting, and were provided reliable, proven standards to follow.

▲ **People placement:** A lot of thought went into who was assigned where, O'Toole explained. "We truly matched our employees' personalities to the

personalities of the units, and we told them why we felt they would succeed."

▲ **Performance awareness:** Before Crothall arrived, EVS employees had not been educated about HCAHPS. Crothall now provides ongoing HCAHPS information and posts results on department boards. Employees can see how they're doing, and high performers are recognized. Performance and training are reinforced by Patient Experience Manager Vanessa Dominguez.

NUMBER ONE IN THE COUNTRY

As these EVS initiatives took hold, staff morale and performance steadily improved.

The ultimate affirmation came earlier last year, when JFK was ranked as the number one hospital in the United States for hospitals with more than 500 beds. This was achieved for the reporting period July 1, 2011, to June 30, 2012, when JFK's housekeeping team earned a score of 83% for the HCAHPS question that asked patients about the "cleanliness of your room."

This achievement "has created a sense of pride as well as momentum for the rest of the patient satisfaction efforts," Thornton said. Crothall was able to turn things around "not at employees' expense and not by turning everybody over," she observed.

"Between the employees' desire to want to make a difference and our desire to drive the standards, it was a successful collaboration," O'Toole stated. The results were bolstered, he noted, by "the strong support we received from the senior management."

SYNERGY AND SAVINGS

Along with EVS, Crothall now also handles linen and patient transportation at JFK.

Thornton said the synergy of having Crothall manage all three has given JFK a better way to use their resources and has notably improved results.

"We have absolutely saved significant money in each of these areas while improving turnaround and other outcome performance metrics," Thornton says.

The clean and well-managed environment that Crothall now supports "creates a level of confidence in the quality of the overall operation," Thornton says.

"We appreciate the partnership. It has brought us a lot of value."