



Pittsburgh Regional Healthcare Initiative

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Cleaner patient environment

Housekeeping key to improvements at St. Margaret

Hospital leaders across the region occasionally invite PRHI staff to visit their hospitals and help them spot ways to accelerate improvements. When Dave Martin,

President and CEO of UPMC St. Margaret's near Aspinwall, made such a request, PRHI team leader Debra Thompson paid a visit. Thompson teaches the basics of PRHI's Perfecting Patient Care system to leaders expressing interest.

"Where to begin always seems to be a challenge. It can seem overwhelming. But we've found that everyone can agree on one thing: they want a clean hospital," said Thompson.

With that in mind, Thompson, Martin, Environmental Services Director John Merkt, and other hospital leaders set off to the floors, where the work is done, to begin detailed observations about hand hygiene. Were soap and alcohol rub dispensers easily accessible? Were they always full? Were gloves always available, and did staff use them appropriately?

Into the patient's domain

These observations soon moved right into patient rooms, and the questions expanded. Housekeeping staff seemed frantically busy. Did the housekeepers have what they needed to do their best work?

Merkt decided to tackle these questions head-on. At first, he observed Lead Environmental Services Aide, Denise Wolfe, as she performed her morning duties. Within days, Merkt showed up in his scrubs to work side by side with Wolfe, to experience first-hand some of the difficulties.

"It made me nervous at first," said Wolfe, "to have people watching me. Usually people come to watch you because you're doing something wrong. But I realized that they were there to find ways to help me, and they did help. So I let them watch now, no problem."

Heavy carts, heavy buckets

The housekeeping cart is laden with cleaning supplies and accompanied by a wheeled, stainless steel bucket filled with cleaning solution, and a dense mop-head. The bucket assembly and wet string-mop weigh over 40 pounds. Just getting to the room to clean it means that the housekeeper must push the heavy cart with one hand, and pull the heavy bucket assembly with the other. When the bucket water must be changed, at the completion of every third room, the aide must roll the bucket down the hall to the utility sink, lift it, pour it out, and refill it.

Watching the housekeeping routine for an hour made improvement potential clear.

"Denise has been a leader on our housekeeping staff for 30 years. You can't find people like her. We need to make her work easier," said Merkt. "I started looking for other cleaning options."

A better mop

Merkt found an industrial model (GPSTTM 2000 system by Geerpres), similar to the Swiffer lightweight mops with microfiber mop heads so popular in households. The mop handle holds cleaning solution, dispensed by a trigger on the handle. Filled and ready for action, the mop weighs just over two pounds.



Is it time to kick the bucket? No wonder the bucket assembly has proven physically burdensome for workers:

Filled bucket	27.5 lb
Wet mop	4.4
Wringer	9.1
Total weight	41 lb

It took a little getting used to. At first, Wolfe was not enamored of the swiveling head. It seemed awkward. But within a few days, the benefits became more and more apparent. Ordinarily, the aide dry-mops the floor to remove debris, then wet-mops to disinfect. The new mop allows both operations to be done in one pass. The new, wider mop-head is more effective at removing dirt and debris. Because the mop-head can be changed frequently, and because the cleaning solution is always clean, the floors in patient rooms are cleaner. (An unexpected windfall: the microfiber mop heads are easier and far less expensive to launder.)

A little safer, a little cleaner

Observations of Wolfe revealed other opportunities to help. While she wiped the surfaces of the room according to a set guideline, she had to make numerous trips back out to the cleaning cart in the hallway to wring or change her cleaning cloth. To simplify the procedure, she prepared Ziploc bags with the necessary number of cleaning cloths for one room, pre-moistened with cleaning solution. When she enters a room, she brings a bag full of clean cloths, and an empty bag for the “dirties.” After working out



Pre-filling Ziploc bags with cleaning cloths and solution saves time, trips to the cart.

some initial bugs in the system, Wolfe now finds the cleaning routine shorter and more thorough, and the disruption to patients minimized. “The Perfecting Patient Care system is about making work less hard,” says PRHI’s Thompson. “When the



Environmental Services Aide, Lisa Thomas, fills the mop handle with cleaning solution. Filled and ready to go, the mop weighs just **2.3 lb**

Bonus: solution is always clean; dry and wet mopping can be done in one operation.



Denise Wolfe and Lisa Thomas with new mop. Bonus: microfiber mop-heads are much less expensive to launder.

right thing is easy to do, everybody wins.”

The new mops and cleaning cloth procedures are catching on with the other housekeepers. Initial reluctance is being overcome as the convenience and time saving become apparent. As this article is being written, the staff at UPMC St. Margaret continue to experiment with refinements to their work.

“Our housekeeping staff is so professional,” says Merkt, “that they welcome improvements. Not only are they safer from injury, but patients are safer every time we figure out how to make a room a little cleaner.”



With a wave of the hand, new proximity-sensing towel dispensers produce a clean paper towel after handwashing. “Every time you can eliminate the need for people to touch things, you reduce opportunities to transmit infection,” says Environmental Services Director, John Merkt. Looking for more such opportunities, Merkt recently had sensor-activated lights installed in supply rooms.

