

Saskatoon Health Region leads the way in transitioning to a provincial linen service

Since November, 2011, Saskatoon Health Region (SHR) has relied on a contract with K-Bro Linen Systems (K-Bro) to provide laundry services to facilities in the region. This shift occurred when a large beam fell in the region's laundry plant forcing the facility to be closed for safety reasons. At that time, health region leaders, the Ministry of Health and the Shared Services Office (which eventually became 3sHealth) were building a business case to explore options for a new provincial linen service.

SHR's need for health care linen services was immediate and urgent. As a result, they entered into a contract with K-Bro to provide linen to their facilities. They were able to use their existing plant as a distribution depot where the clean linen was delivered and then distributed to their end user sites.

In May 2013, 3sHealth announced that a decision had been made to create a provincial health care linen system for the province. The five existing regional laundries would be phased out and replaced by a new state-of-the-art plant in Regina built and operated by a third party provider. In December 2013, 3sHealth announced that the provider would be K-Bro. Since the announcement, 3sHealth has been working with K-Bro, its partners in health regions and agencies to develop a transition plan for the new linen service which is scheduled to be completed by December 31, 2015.

In the meantime, SHR has been moving forward with linen transitions of its own. In January 2014, the linen depot moved to an interim location when the lease to the space they were using expired. Another move happened a few months later when K-Bro opened their Saskatoon distribution centre on April 1st. The K-Bro distribution centre is now serving SHR alone as part of their contract with the region, but it will eventually become part of the provincial linen system along with the plant in Regina and another distribution depot in Prince Albert.

As a client of K-Bro, the Saskatoon experience is providing 3sHealth with valuable information that will inform the transition for other regions as they become users of the K-Bro service. Saskatoon has led the way in a number of areas:

Improved processes

Transitioning to a new linen provider, and most recently, to a new distribution depot, has challenged SHR to adapt many of their linen processes to the new environment. At the same time, it has provided many opportunities to evaluate these processes and make improvements in the storage, handling, transportation and use of linen in region facilities.

Most recently, the region has completed the transition to a cart exchange system for all of the Saskatoon facilities. Up until June 1 2014, Saskatoon City Hospital, Parkridge Centre and St. Paul's Hospital were already receiving their linen on carts that had been made up by K-Bro, ready for distribution to units. However, Royal University Hospital (RUH) was still receiving clean linen on bulk carts. These carts of bulk linen were delivered to RUH and then staff members were required to build the carts on-site for distribution to the units. On June 1, RUH began transitioning to the cart exchange system, completing that transition at the end of June.

Now the process for building carts for the whole region happens at the K-Bro depot. In a streamlined process, carts for each unit are coded with a unique UPC code, items are counted according to the inventory needs for each unit, and linen is organized throughout the depot into specialty areas. For example, when loading a cart for a pediatric unit, all the pediatric items are located in one area of the depot floor. Carts are also weighed and measured before and after loading to ensure the correct amount of inventory is loaded. Carts are wrapped and covered to prevent contamination of any kind from the depot to the unit.

For RUH, the building of carts off-site has freed over 1,000 square feet of space.

Product conversions

K-Bro is not only providing laundry service but provides a number of options with the linen that is being, and will be used. During this transition SHR, and eventually the whole province, will be standardising the linen products that they use. The advantages to this are many, including:

- Higher quality items
- Reduced cost because items are purchased in larger amounts
- The opportunity to create standard work for handling practices, auditing, colour coding for sizes



Some examples of product conversion that have already happened in SHR include towels for long-term care residents, bed pads, baby sleepers, microfiber cleaning cloths, bedspreads and pillowcases.

New towels for long term care (in the front) are larger, softer and last longer

Transporting soiled linen safely and efficiently

Getting clean linen to the units of the health facilities is only one-half of the linen story. Transporting soiled linen in a way that is safe and efficient for workers and prevents contamination is the other side of the story. K-Bro has purchased over 200 new carts to transport soiled linen. Their \$340,000 investment has captured capital cost avoidance for the health region. But most importantly, the new carts have eliminated the need to store soiled linen on floors, reducing double handling (lifting of these heavy bags) for staff. Soiled linen bags are loaded onto the cart at the facility, rolled onto trucks and sent to the depot and then transferred onto larger trucks at the depot for shipment back to Calgary for laundering. Standard work for the carts ensures they are not overloaded.



Soiled linen is moved off the truck at the K-Bro depot loading dock in Saskatoon

Focusing on quality

The quality of linen service is measured in a number of ways. Most importantly, is the linen arriving at the unit clean and without defects? SHR, 3sHealth and K-Bro are conducting quality audits to measure this. The first quality audit was conducted for Saskatoon in June 2014. The target of the audit is that 90% of the linen delivered to the units is defect free. In June this target was exceeded by 4%. In the coming months, quality audit processes will be established for the remaining laundry facilities in the province. Once the provincial linen service is fully operational, quality audits will be carried out regularly as part of the contract agreement with K-Bro.



A black mesh bag attached to a linen cart

One innovation that will contribute to achieving quality is the Black Mesh Bag program. These bags are attached to the carts delivered to the units. When staff members discover an item that has not been properly cleaned or is damaged, it is placed in the Black Mesh Bag. When the cart arrives back at the depot, the K-Bro staff can determine if the item can be repaired or needs to be discarded. In this way, defective linen is removed from the inventory rather than being cycled back to the units repeatedly. SHR is not

invoiced for items that are placed in the Black Mesh Bag. A standard work card is attached to every cart to explain the process.

The road ahead

Learnings from the transition at SHR will inform the transition process for the whole province. The creation and implementation of standard work, audit measures, quality audits, and new products will all be incorporated into the new service.

“Our experiences in Saskatoon Health Region will help our team when making transition plans for other regions,” says Jim Crawford, Director, Provincial Linen Services at 3sHealth. “We are continuing to learn better ways to deliver a quality service – and that will make all the difference to patients and residents.”