

## Stakeholders discuss the future of environmental services for health care

The Lead and Operation Team members for the Environment Services business case met on September 10 and 11, 2013 to review data that was collected as part of the business case development and to provide direction for the interim report.

Building on the discussions and consensus that stakeholders identified at the Environmental Services Visioning Day in June, the group agreed that the focus for this service is to enhance patient safety through infection prevention and control, improve access to care through better patient flow, increase confidence and satisfaction with facility cleanliness and achieve savings through improved quality and efficiency.



**Members of the operations team consider the data presentations.**

Representatives from Regional Health Authorities (RHAs) and the Saskatchewan Cancer Agency included environmental services and infection prevention and control leaders. A patient advisor also attended the meetings. The group listened to presentations and participated in discussions based on data that was gathered in July and August. A large amount of quantitative data was collected using a detailed electronic survey that contained 65 questions regarding region facilities and RHA operations.

In addition to the quantitative data, the group reviewed qualitative data based on extensive site visits. Twenty-six facilities in all twelve RHAs and two SCA facilities were visited. The site visit teams spent 13 days and traveled 5,000 kilometers. They were able to view operations first hand and interviewed over 100 people including health region managers and front-line environmental service workers.

“One of the most consistent themes that emerged from our data collection was the inconsistency across the province,” says Mark Heller, Project Lead for the Environmental

Services business case. “There is huge variation in the way Environmental Services is delivered, depending on the community and the facility.”

Consistency, which refers to uniform provincial quality standards, as well as standard processes and province-wide competency-driven training were characteristics that participants unanimously agreed are important for the future state of environmental services. Another “must have” that was identified is a province-wide system to evaluate the achievement of standards once they have been established. The group identified other functions that would benefit from provincial coordination including environmental infection prevention and control standards, group purchasing for products and technology, protocols and procedures, employee recruitment and management tools, safe work practices, and staff scheduling.

“Traditionally, environmental services has not been viewed as part of the care team,” said Carol Hildebrand, Regional Manager Environmental and Laundry Services for the Cypress Health Region. “If we establish evidence-based provincial standards and standard work, it would validate the important contribution we make to the patient experience.”

While the presentation of the data highlighted the challenges that are currently present in the system, it also allowed the group to discuss areas that each health region felt could be improved. The sharing of data also allowed some regions to share their successes and innovations in addressing these challenges.



**A group discusses the features of a potential service delivery model.**

On the second day of the workshop, small groups met to discuss different delivery models for the future state of environmental services. Each group was assigned a different model to discuss: Enhanced Status Quo, Lead Agency, Provincially Centralized, or Third Party Provider. Group members were asked to identify how a number of functions including policies and standards, monitoring, metrics and outcomes, workforce, technology, efficiency measures, and cost would be managed under each model. “Pros” and “cons” for each model were discussed with the larger group.

Feedback from attendees will be used by the business case project team to refine the data and build the interim business case to be presented to the lead and operations teams at the end of September.

At the end of the two days, the group's wrap-up comments were positive. Many felt that working together as a provincial group would benefit patients and workers by improving quality, safety, and efficiency.

"I am impressed by the knowledge and collective wisdom that is in this room," said the patient advisor that attended the two-day meeting. "Patients need to understand and appreciate the valuable work that environmental service workers provide."