

## Provincial Linen Services: Quick Wins Improve Patient Experience and Capture Savings

3sHealth, working in partnership with the health regions and the Saskatchewan Cancer Agency, is implementing “Quick Win” linen solutions that will improve the patient experience and capture savings across the province.

The Quick Win solutions that are currently being implemented are:

- In the Regina Qu’Appelle Health Region (RQHR) , protective underpads on beds are being replaced with ‘fusion’ pads that are more absorbent, weigh 25% less, have a longer life and cost less to launder. The pads are thinner and are more comfortable to lie on.
- The replacement of small standard wash cloths with softer colour- and size-coded cloths in long term care settings. The colour and size of the cloths signal to care providers the purpose of the cloth (face vs body cleansing).
- Larger, softer towels for long term care residents. These towels have a longer life reducing replacement costs and their higher absorbency means fewer towels need to be used.
- The replacement of nylon soiled linen bags with recyclable plastic bags. The new plastic bags provide a much more effective barrier between the soiled linen and those who are in close proximity to it. The plastic bags do not need to be laundered. This saves water, energy and the use of chemicals and eliminates processing costs.

In most cases, these initiatives will save the system significant costs. But that is not the primary goal. “The goal of Hospital Laundry Services is to make the patient experience more pleasant,” says Giles Vanderlann, Manager, Hospital Laundry Services for Regina Qu'Appelle Health Region. “The introduction of the ‘fusion’ pads has significant clinical benefits because the pads wick moisture away from the skin. Plus, the low profile of the pads fosters patient comfort.”

Softer towels and cleansing cloths will also greatly improve patient and resident comfort. The conversion to the new pads will begin in Regina. The whole province will transition to new pads within two years.

Another area that will benefit from the ‘Quick Wins’ is infection prevention and control. Most notably, the use of the plastic soiled linen bags will improve patient and worker safety by providing an effective barrier against infection. Worker safety will also be improved because the new bags are lighter to lift and are easier to stack.



**Plastic Bag Collection**

The conversion to plastic bag use is happening region by region. “We made the switch to plastic bags in early August,” says Shirley Wheeler, Regional Director, Environmental Services for Sun Country Health Region. “I believe this is a great move for infection control and odor control and is an even greater step toward staff injury reduction which is one of our health region’s strategic goals. It will also help us reduce costs.”

The use of higher quality terry products has several advantages. In the case of the colour- and size-coded wash cloths, care aides, families and patients will be assured that personal care will have a higher level of hygiene and can feel more confident that cloths used throughout the facility will be used for the same purpose each time. The increased size of the cloths will allow care workers to use fewer cloths per task, replacing the 3 or 4 cloths that are sometimes necessary with the former product. The RQHR has been using the new cloths for a year. For the first year, they reduced their consumption rate by 60%. The switch to the new cloths will be completed throughout the province by 2014. It is also expected that fewer cloths will be lost or discarded. This innovation will improve the patient experience, lower inventory, significantly improve infection prevention and control and decrease processing costs.

#### **Quick Facts**

- The province purchases 350,000 wash cloths annually costing 16¢ each. A 60% reduction in annual purchasing and reduced consumption will save \$22,400.
- The Regina laundry processes approximately 7.3 million lbs of linen per year – primarily for the RQHR and Cypress Hills health regions. About 300,000 soiled linen bags are needed for processing this linen.
- A full nylon bag of soiled linen weighs 20 lbs – a full plastic bag weighs 15 lbs.
- It is expected that the health system will save up to \$100,000 a year in processing costs by converting to plastic soiled linen bags.
- 25,000 towels are purchased annually for health system long term care facilities.

A customer satisfaction survey that was conducted in March, 2013, provided input for some of the improvements. “The information that we gathered from the survey is helping us create a future model for linen services that ensures high quality linen, when and where it is needed, at a cost that is sustainable,” says Jim Crawford, 3sHealth’s Director of Provincial Linen Services. “We are using this information to improve the patient experience, establish province-wide standards for infection prevention and control, and create safe working environments for staff.”