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Provincial linen service focuses on quality

When it comes to quality of care, nothing should be considered inconsequential including linen supplies. Clean bedding, a soft bath towel or washcloth can make a huge difference to the experience of acute care patients and long-term care residents.

This is why quality measures for linen are a critical part of the new provincial linen service.

3sHealth, the health regions, and the Saskatchewan Cancer Agency are working together with K-Bro Linen Systems on a number of initiatives to ensure patients experience quality linen during hospital or out-patient visits, or as long-term care residents.

Quality standards, audited on a quarterly basis, are one significant step toward improvement. Quality monitors examine features such as whiteness, fabric strength, pH level and chlorine retention, presence of stains and dye transfer, burns, melting, shrinkage, wrinkles, folding, tears, holes, and other defects in the linen items.

“A passing mark is 90%, and we normally see some small ups and downs in quarterly audit scores. The important thing is to identify any issues and get them dealt with. If there is a drop in the score, it is a signal to us to work together to find the cause and make improvements. As we make these improvements we are continuously striving for a 100% defect-free score,” says Jim Crawford, director of the provincial linen service.

For the past year, audits have been conducted on a quarterly basis for the regional laundries - North Sask Laundry in Prince Albert, Regina, Saskatoon, Yorkton, and Weyburn. Together, representatives from 3sHealth and each laundry facility audit random samples from clean linen carts or storage areas. Carts from different areas in facilities and from different facilities within a region are sampled during the audits. The audits involve representatives from 3sHealth, linen managers, and front-line staff. During the audits, 3sHealth and the health regions identify areas for improvement and work with the laundries to implement strategies to improve quality. Similar audits will be introduced this fall when the regions and Saskatchewan Cancer Agency transition to the new service provided by K-Bro Linen.

“Transparent audits are a good thing,” says Gary Paydli, regional manager for linen services in Saskatoon Health Region. “The audits are unscheduled and are conducted in different areas of the region. The information we gather helps identify ways we can improve quality and ways K-Bro can improve. There is a shared responsibility to provide quality to our patients and residents.”

With the implementation of the new service, a number of improvements will also be made to the standard inventory of linen items across the province. Focusing on the latest textiles, leaders in linen services choose items for their durability and the safety and comfort they provide to patients. Some examples include larger, softer towels for long-term care residents, colour-coded wash cloths,

April 30, 2015

standard bedding, and standard patient gowns and robes. Using standard high-quality items will ensure a consistently good patient experience throughout the province.



Black mesh bag on linen cart

In addition to a new standard linen inventory and an auditing process to ensure provincial quality standards are met, the new linen service has created a common way to identify defective linen items and remove them from the inventory before they reach the patient. K-Bro uses a 'black mesh bag' program with its customers. As part of the program, care providers place defective linen in black mesh bags, which are stored on carts or in clean linen storage areas. Once an item is placed in a black mesh bag, it is either repaired or removed from the inventory. The customer also receives a credit for the defective linen item. Some facilities have already started using the black mesh bags.

K-Bro began using the black mesh bag program in Saskatoon when it opened its distribution depot in April, 2014. To ensure the bags are being used consistently in facilities, representatives from K-Bro, the region, and 3sHealth are meeting regularly with front-line staff and managers to talk about the importance of the program and how using the black mesh bags can affect the quality of patient care.

"I firmly believe that working together with all of our stakeholders in a transparent way is making a big difference in the way we implement quality in our region," says Paydli. "Regular meetings and open communication are the keys to strengthening our partnership. The message is that everyone is accountable for this."

Laundry managers no longer have to rely on anecdotal information but have real data and evidence to influence planning and ensure problems are corrected. In the 12-month period since the audits began, all the laundries have received a passing mark of 90per cent; some are exceeding that target.

"The quality of items in the provincial linen inventory, which contains older and newer items, constantly changes as items are reprocessed," says Crawford. "To ensure we are continually providing a high-quality product to patients, residents, clinicians, and front-line workers, we need to track performance in a measurable way. The quarterly audits and black mesh bag program provide us with the information we need to do this."